digit FastTrack

YOUR HANDY GUIDE TO EVERYDAY TECHNOLOGY

to
FREE
EVERYTHING

- ✷ Who doesn't like free stuff?
- ✷ The origins and culture of free software
- ✷ Gaming for free (legally!)
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- ✷ Free domains, free hosting
- ✷ Free education
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- ✷ Free (and open) hardware

FAST TRACK *to*

FREE
EVERYTHING

CHAPTERS

FREE EVERYTHING
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Who doesn't like free stuff?

At the risk of perpetuating a stereotype, we must admit, we love free stuff. We, as people, are always on the lookout for deals, freebies, and generally anything that can be acquired without shelling out a Rupee. Sometimes, we will even make a purchase just because we are getting something free with it. This *Fast Track* is intended to gratify this very... err... basic need.

It has been 65 years since India gained independence and in keeping with the theme of Freedom, we decided to show you how you can be a free digital native. So long as you have a hardware device which will get you

online (or one that lets you pop in one of our DVDs), it is just a matter of a couple of clicks to get you in touch with the best free stuff.

And it's not just free software or utilities to boost your productivity that we cover in this *Fast Track*. We have gone all out and scoured the net for not just free software, but also free apps, free games, free web-hosting services and even free Ivy League education! You can also learn a new skill for free thanks to the many interesting resources out there. But pointing you to free stuff is one thing, we have also included helpful tips on how to get the most out of your free stuff. We've looked at literally hundreds of free services and curated the best ones for you. The same goes for apps and software that needs to be installed locally. Our suggestions have been hand picked and listed out with inherent pros and cons so as to help you choose the best ones for your need.

When we talk of free stuff, apart from the "no-money" connotation, we have also looked at it from the freedom or liberty perspective. For instance the open hardware movement that we cover in our last chapter touches upon some free and open hardware products which allow you (the user) to modify or tweak hardware, just like you would tweak a source code of an open source OS to customise it according to your needs.

In keeping with the opensource ethic, do share some of the coolest free services / software / and concepts that you come across and give back to the community. We'll be waiting for your posts on our Facebook page and your mails at *editor@thinkdigit.com*. Happy reading!

THE ORIGINS AND CULTURE OF FREE SOFTWARE

F ree! Just the thought of getting something you want without shelling out absolutely any cash, is an opportunity not even a millionaire would pass up on. Thanks to the benevolent hackers out there, after a bit of searching the average computer user can download most of software for free (illegally, of course). And we're dead against it. At the same time several companies release their software online for no charge. So, does all of this count as *free* software? Well, the answer is both yes and no. It depends on which way you're looking at it. When the term free software is used, the word free can refer

to both software that is available for no monetary cost at all and at the same time freedom or liberty of the user in using the software. Free software in the second context, also known as software libre or many other names, is - according to the online definition - 'software that can be used, studied and modified without restriction, and which can be copied and redistributed in modified or unmodified form either without restriction, or with restrictions that only ensure that further recipients have the same rights under which it was obtained and that

manufacturers of consumer products incorporating free software provide the software as source code'. Often free software of the open kind is also available as free software of the no-money kind. The common mantra associated with free software *free as in free speech, not free as in free beer* would perhaps do a good job of explaining the concept that free software focuses more on liberty, not in price or methodology. So, the next time you hear the term

Richard Stallman

free software, saying out loud "Oh awesome, it's not going to cost me a dime", might just make you seem ignorant in front of all your friends, because ironically even though free software is generally available without charge, it is not bound to such a restriction. And over the last decade or so, free software has become a phenomenon not just limited to enthusiastic coders/hackers, but has become a force in the server market, with lots of companies now backing it.

Back in the beginning, during the 1950s and 60s, almost all software was produced by computer science academics and corporate researchers working in collaboration. The software communities back then could actually be compared with today's free-software movement long before the term "free-software" was even coined. The source code, which is the human-readable form of software, was distributed along with the software itself as users would modify the software themselves frequently, to enable it to run on different hardware or Operating systems, and to fix bugs or add functionality. Hence, in this era due to software changes that were a necessity because of compatibility requirements, software was free anyway, and not as the result of an effort by software users and developers.

In the late 1960s, there was an increase in the amount of software being sold under restrictive licenses. Soon, most computer vendors and software companies began charging for software licenses, and enforced restrictive licenses on the usage

of their software. So in 1983, Richard Stallman, a regular in the hacker community and a programmer at the MIT Artificial Intelligence Laboratory, launched the GNU (GNU's Not Unix) Project citing the change in the culture of the computer industry as the reason for his frustration and the main motivation towards this initiative. And eventually in 1989, the first version of the GNU General Public License (GPL) was published.

The GPL is the first "copyleft" license for general use. Copyleft (a play on the word copyright), is basically a form of licensing and it is the practice of using copyright law to offer the right to distribute copies and modified versions of a work and requiring that the same rights be preserved in modified versions of the work, in contrast to copyright law, which is used by an author to prohibit others from reproducing, adapting, or distributing copies of the author's work. The GPL is still the most widely used free software license.

GNU's not UNIX

The term free software was coined in 1983 by Richard Stallman when he started the free software movement 'to satisfy the need for and to give the benefit of software freedom to computer users'. He then went on and founded the Free Software Foundation in 1985 to further help in advancing his idea of free software. Then, in 1986 the Free Software Foundation published the first formal definition of free software. Written by Richard Stallman, this is still the formal definition and states that software is free if the people who gain access to it have the following four freedoms:

▸ The freedom to run the program for any purpose
▸ The freedom to study how the program works, and change it to make it do what you wish
▸ The freedom to redistribute copies so you can help your neighbour.
▸ The freedom to improve the program, and release your improvements (and modified versions in general) to the public, so that the whole community benefits.

So, if a license provides all those freedoms, the software covered by that license is considered to be free software. There are many licenses apart from the GPL that meet the criteria of these rules as well.

And however misleading it might be, because of the above definition free software is not the same as freeware. Freeware is software that is available

for use at no cost or for an optional fee, but it does have one or more restricted usage rights, and hence cannot be free as such.

But then what's open source? Terming the free software movement anti-commercial, Eric. S. Raymond and Bruce Perens started the Open Source Initiative (OSI) to bring practical benefits of freely available source code. It's a term which is now widely being used and gaining popularity across all sections of computer users. Open Source software is computer software that is available in source code form – and the license permits users to study, change, improve and at times also distribute the software. The obvious meaning of open source would perhaps be 'any software whose source code files are available' – but then this is not strictly the entire definition as given by the OSI. The huge number of licenses for Open source, and the ambiguous usage of the term itself makes it slightly difficult to make out the exact difference between free software and open source, but it more or less boils down to the philosophical values aspect of it. The term 'open source' is associated more with ideas that are based on the practical benefits of the software, such as making it more powerful or reliable. Whereas, free software focuses on the rights of the user to be able to improve or distribute the software, without any restrictions. So, no matter what kind of software it is, even if it is something that perhaps is designed to restrict a user's access to information, 'open source' would work towards making that program more powerful, contrary to 'free software' which would be against it for its basic obligation towards the rights of a user. From the four rules for a software to be termed free as mentioned above, it is clear that since access to the source code is required – free software has to be open source software as well. But, the reverse is not true in all the cases, as there are some licenses used with open source which do not necessarily meet all the requirements and hence not considered free. Software such as Firefox, VLC Media player, Blender, Audacity and also the GNU Linux kernel are all also open source and free software.

Tens of millions of people now use free software. Linus Torvalds put up the original Linux kernel for everyone to modify it back in 1991, and now it is a worldwide phenomenon which has constantly grown in competence and stature thanks to the contributions of millions of people worldwide. Free software developers work in virtual communities with little or zero face-to-face meetings with each other. They are all a part of a culture where recognition and respect is gained with how much you give/contribute towards the development of a common cause. Today, the open source movement is a reality, and we are witnessing it blossom.

GAMING
FOR FREE

G ames and free! Two words that seem to be used together nowa-days with increasing frequency. It is easier and cheaper now to make games than it ever has been before, and the end result is that there are a plethora of Indie games developed out of love and passion that are available for free.

Don't take this to mean that free games are a new concept, by no stretch of the imagination! Many popular titles such as Doom and Quake were distributed for free, as shareware, a term now lost in history. These games were distributed with a limited level set so players could play a good chunk of the game — often hours of gameplay — for free, and could purchase the rest if they wanted.

This might seem like the concept of game demos as it exists today, but shareware was more than that. It is a rare demo today that gives more than

an hour of gameplay and with shareware however, we are talking about a good solid chunk of gameplay. Quake for example offered the entire first episode in its shareware version for free, which is quite a bit considering Quake had four episodes of around eight levels each. You got one fourth of the game for free. Similarly, Doom, the predecessor to Quake—again by id—was released as shareware with a third of the game (1 of 3 episodes) available for free as shareware.

Now remember, Quake, Doom and Wolfenstein 3D (again one-third released as shareware) weren't exactly famous for their immersive story-telling, but as mechanically and technically sound games that were very fun to play. For a student who couldn't afford the game when it was released, playing through till the end wasn't as important as being able to play at all and have fun. This gave them a legal way to play the game and it has given id Software enough of a karma boost that even their less impressive games do well.

Free Games!

We have a very different model for free games today; and the kind of games you can get for free fall under some broad categories. These aren't exhaustive, and we don't want to be reductionist and say they in they end they will all boil down to these. Look on them as more of a general trend or common traits among free games.

Abandonware

Now here what we have is a concept that is legally dubious at best. Generally abandonware is considered to be software that is no longer being offered or sold by the people who created it. These creators often own the copyright and it is in fact illegal to download such software even though there is no way for you to get the software legally from the original creators. Sometimes due to the company going out of business, merging with another, or being bought out, the state of the copyright is unknown.

Technically they are neither free, nor paid, they are just not for sale—pretty much like the packet of biscuits I am eating right now. So why do we mention them at all? Because we feel this category is still linked—at least in people's minds—to freeware, or at least stuff you can get for free. Not mentioning it would be leaving a huge piece of culture out. In the mind of this author at least using abandonware isn't a moral issue, it's more of a legal one.

That being said, we won't list these games because they are still illegal. Also, it would be impossible to. Any game ever released but no longer for sale would be here, and that is a LONG list. Websites offering such games and software are littered all over the internet though.

Previously commercial games available for free

There are a number of cases—not too many though—when a company decides to give away their software for free when they are no longer selling it. Some companies decide to relinquish the rights to a game rather than have it fade away. Such games are entirely legal to download and play. They are not abandonware, although they are no longer supported.

You will be surprised to see some, if not most of the games in this list, and it is important to note that some might take quite some effort to get running, as they were designed for computers of another time. These are more than just games though, they are part of gaming history.

Wolfenstein 3D and Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory

Let us start with Wolfenstein 3D since we have mentioned it before. While id open sources its game engines when it makes a newer version, the graphics assets usually aren't open sourced or made freely available. However, this year, on the 20th anniversary of the release of Wolfenstein 3D, it was made available for free to play in the browser in its entirety.

wolfenstein.com

Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory is a more recent game in the series,

and like the above, it is open source and entirely free. It is however a multiplayer-only game which was released for free due to issues with the single player bit.

http://dgit.in/Mps1rT

Beneath a Steel Sky

This game is a must-have for adventure fans. It released back in 1995 was a huge success commercially and critically. It won awards for being the "Best Adventure" game and for "Best Dialogue". Today it is available for free,

and runs on ScummVM, a popular emulator for old adventure games.

It is included in the repositories of some Linux distros, or it can be obtained from the ScummVM site. If you are Windows user the best option is to download it from GOG.com where it is available for free.

http://dgit.in/NmbEgq
http://www.scummvm.org/

Adventureland

This text adventure game is a part of history, being the first commercial text adventure game for home computers. Now it is a free game and can be played online in the browser via Java.

http://dgit.in/P4p8AL

Grand Theft Auto and Grand Theft Auto 2

Yes, the games that preceded the game that launched a thousand controversies are available for free. The first game set the trend for giving the player complete freedom in an action game setting. The first game was released in 1997. Grand Theft Auto 2 was released in 1999 and continued and expanded on the original game's formula.

The games are now available for free from the website of their developer, Rockstar itself.

http://dgit.in/N5l1p8

Elite

This is possibly the most popular—from a

historic perspective at least—space trading game. The developers turned the limitations of that generation's technology into an advantage when instead of having predefined levels, the levels were procedurally, and randomly generated. This meant each playthrough was different.

Now the game with source is available for download for free.

http://dgit.in/MlQa7N

Dink Smallwood

This incredibly fun RPG has had lasting appeal. In fact this game can still be purchased for iOS and Android while the PC version is free. The game was open sourced along with its assets, which means it is included in a number of Linux distro repositories and is ported to a number of platforms.

The HD remake can be download for free from the developer's website.

http://dgit.in/MpcB8w

Elder Scrolls: Arena and Elder Scrolls: Daggerfall

We kid you not! The first two entries in the Elder Scrolls series—Arena and Daggerfall, released in 1994 and 1996 respectively—are now entirely free. Before you head into the latest Skyrim game, there is no excuse not to play the first two entries.

elderscrolls.com/arena
elderscrolls.com/daggerfall

Command and Conquer, Command and Conquer: Red Alert, and Command and Conquer: Tiberian Sun

Hate EA all you want, but they made these games available for free. Old as they may be (1995, 1996, and 1999 respectively) they are well regarded real time strategy games.

They are a little hard to find normally, however this Command and Conquer Wiki seems to have all the download links handy.

http://dgit.in/M6Qntz

SimCity

If you are hoping we are talking about the SimCity game coming out next year, we are sorry. This is abut the classic original SimCity game that came out in 1989. Such make sure you have a computer with better specs than a 6MHz CPU, 2MB HDD space and 512KB RAM.

It is now in fact open source, but since EA own the trademark for SimCity it has been renamed to Micropolis.

http://dgit.in/MptfmT

Death Rally

Another classic game from a bygone era. DeathRally has you racing and shooting at the same time with little consideration for the safety of other drivers and pedestrians.

http://dgit.in/NfCZol

Savage XR, and Savage 2: A Tortured Soul

These games combine the FPS and RTS genres into a unique blend of gameplay. This are multiplayer-only games so you might want to bring a friend or two into the fold. It's a good thing they're free.

http://dgit.in/MlQofk
http://dgit.in/NquVim
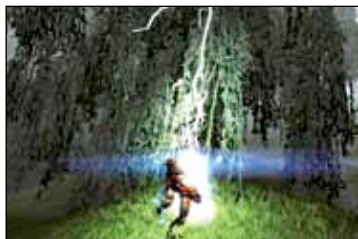
Savage XR

Savage 2

Starsiege Tribes

Starsiege Tribes 2

Starsiege: Tribes and Tribes 2

Tribes has seen a recent resurgence with the release of Tribes: Ascend—which is free to play as well and listed later on—however, these games are where it all started.

Both these FPS games are available for free and currently hosted at fileplanet, which might be shutting down soon. Grab them while they're hot.

http://dgit.in/NuGyBƒ
http://dgit.in/M6QDsC

Indie games

These games are made by Indie developers as a means of pure expression rather than with some expectation of commerce. A lot of these are artist expressions that play with the very concept of gaming. Some are homages to games of the past. Other are just rubbish.

What is intersting though, is that this is also the category with the most freeware games. It's quite interesting to see that most of the free games are coming from individual or small developers who probably need the money more. This probably tells you more about life than anything else ever will.

Octodad

How about a game where you are an Octopus and control each limb individually? Game controls don't get more complicated than this. But how can you pass up a game with the tagline "Loving Father. Caring Husband. Secret Octopus."? The answer is you cant.

octodadgame.com

Cave Story

This free indie game pays homage to classic games such as Meteroid and Castlevania. It has tight gameplay, and good story, the price of zero doesn't hurt either.

cavestory.org

Narbacular Drop

This is a game developed by a bunch of students who went on to join Valve and create the brilliant game Portal. In fact this is the game that formed the basis for Portal and it has many of the same portal-driven mechanics. If you want to meet the mother of Portal, look no further.

http://dgit.in/LkKLwu

Façade

Façade is an experimental game that pushes the boundaries of gaming. You interact with other characters with words, not predefined dialogue trees but actual sentences you yourself compose. The AI has its own personality, and where the game goes depends on what you say, how you say it when you say it and where you say it.

interactivestory.net
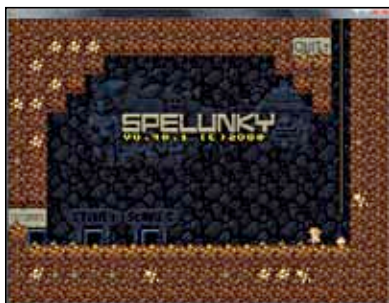
Spelunky

The free game has turned quite a few heads and has won many awards. It was always free for PC, and still is, but a paid version is available for Xbox 360 as well now.

spelunkyworld.com

Temporal

This is a game that makes time travel a core part of the game play. As a confused robot you must complete levels by travelling in time, often interacting with yourself in the process. You can create paradoxes such as having your future self finish a level, but making it impossible for a past version to do the same.

This game is hard to find now as the original site seems to have gone down.

http://dgit.in/PRzXHN

Toribash

This is a fighting game that takes simulation to the extreme level. You control each and every joint of a fighter, and sequence actions to make your own fighting move. The move is then played back on your opponent, to often hilarious consequences.

toribash.com

Open Source Games

There are tons of open source games that you will find when you look into a Linux ditro's repositories, however most of them are available only on

Linux. These are games that are more about mechanics rather than graphics, although there are outliers.

Of course as we all know, graphics are the single most important thing about games, which is why Super Mario Brothers and Tetris were failures and critically panned to this day. It is also why the movie Titanic provides a better experience than the game, Limbo. And yes, we are being sarcastic.

The open source gaming scene is overpopulated with FPS games, but we have tried to maintain a wider sample in the following list:

0 A.D.

This game started off as a total conversion mod for Age Of Empires II, but now is a standalone open source game. If you care about graphics you probably skipped this section, but this game actually does quite well in that department. It is still in alpha but plays quite well.

wildfiregames.com/0ad/

The Battle for Wesnoth

This turn based strategy game has been undergoing active development for quite a while. Unlike 0 A.D., this is a complete game and includes a number of missions.

wesnoth.org

Hedgewars

If you enjoy playing Worms, here is a clone that you can play for free.

hedgewars.org
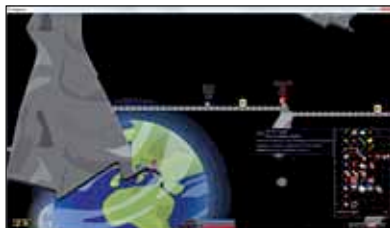
Ryzom

How about an open source MMORPG? Not only is the client of Ryzom open source, but so is the server. So if you

want you can have your own world running in your locality so you can play with just your friends. Not only that it is free to play on the official servers up to level 125.

ryzom.com

Xonotic

This fast-paced FPS game works well on older computers, looks and plays well, and no one needs to pay.

xonotic.org

Vdrift

If you are more interested in racing simulation than graphics, Vdrift is a game with exactly that focus.

vdrift.net

Vega Strike

This is a 3D space trading and combat simulator and that should be enough for you considering that it is almost a dead genre.

http://dgit.in/NmcXMk

FreeCiv

FreeCiv is an open source Civilization clone that includes features from across all Civilization titles—including the hexagonal tiles of Civ V. It is also

available in a web version that can be played in the browser, but that requires some setup.

http://dgit.in/NSyZ9Z

Mari0

If you consider yourself a fan of both Mario and Portal, why the hell do we have to tell you about this game? Imagine if you could play all the classic levels of Mario—and more—but with the a portal gun. Actually don't imagine, just download the game.

stabyourself.net/mari0/

Free-to-Play games

Now we come to the aptly named yet somewhat deceptive, Free 2 Play model. Free to play games, as the name suggests, do not cost anything to "play" but a closer look is needed at this genre so you understand what you are getting into.

Yes, you are free to play the game, but remember the common adage, if you aren't paying for the product, you are the product. Of course no sensible developer / publisher will spend tons of money to make a game that will get them nothing in return. So ask your self what are they getting in return?

First of all you will notice that while there is no shortage of these games, none of them are single player. Multiplayer games are more attractive for many people because you are playing with other people and so you have a better challenge. For some it is a matter of pride to be high up in the leaderboards, for others it is a matter of community. Most importantly, single player games have no way of coming back to the developer with money.

The fact is, free to play games with micro transactions or purchasable items often end up giving the developers more revenue than even a straight-up $60 game would. Of course there are also games that have more of a shareware model, you can play up to a particular level and no more.

In the the end, there are different ways of getting money out of people, some are OK, while others are horrible. We will classify them based on the kind of model they use. Note that it is still best you fully evaluate a game in order to fully realize the scope and impact of the business model.

NOTE: We have listed a number of beta games here, and for good reason. An MMO is something that you spend a lot of time playing, so we are biasing this list towards upcoming games or those that will be here for a long time.

I can haz hats

These are games that do not offer those who pay any benefits other than cosmetic changes to their gameplay. You can buy skins, or hats or models or even guns, but they don't improve your stats in any way. You can complete the game, or win it, without spending a penny, the only opportunity you lose is that of standing out.

Because the game is free more people will play it, the larger the community, the more people are likely to buy these cosmetic items. Also, the larger the community the more some people want to stand out. Since this game has to make money this method is best, since it favours no one.

Name	Link
Team Fortress 2	http://dgit.in/NfEzqb
Dota 2 [yet to be released to the public]	http://dgit.in/NxpheV
The Secret World	thesecretworld.com
Path of Exile [beta]	pathofexile.com
End of Nations [beta]	endofnations.com
PlanetSide 2 [beta]	planetside2.com

I wantz to saves time

These games allow you buy items that improve your stats, but these items can be obtained by anyone playing the game if they play longer. They could also offer experience boosts, so you get more experience points and level up faster than people not paying for the game.

For those with more money than time, it essentially lets them cut the line and get through the game faster while competing with others. Even within this model there are good and bad ways of doing things. If you need to play the game for tens of hours to obtain the same item that someone could otherwise outright buy, that is bad.

There are a growing number of people today that have a job and enjoy gaming, but just don't have the time to grind for hours. What they do have

is the money. Those who don't have the money can still get around the game without paying money and while those who pay might get stuff faster, they are not restricted from anything. It is quite likely that free players will be better at the game just because they have played it longer.

Name	Link
Tribes: Ascend	http://dgit.in/LUpYfX
Blacklight: Retribution	blacklight.perfectworld.com
Age of Empires Online	ageofempiresonline.com
Heroes of Newerth	heroesofnewerth.com
League of Legends	leagueoflegends.com
Super MNC	uberent.com
Rise of Immortals	riseofimmortals.com

I can playz moar

Here the concept is simple, if you pay, you can go beyond a certain level or map set, otherwise you cant. As simple as that. Often in the case of MMOs, this won't stop you from continuing to play, but it might stop progress in the game which is kinda the point. Look at this as an extended demo of—often—dozens of hours. Just know what you are getting yourself into.

Name	Link
World of Warcraft	battle.net/wow/
Quake Live	quakelive.com
Star Trek Online	sto.perfectworld.com
EverQuest 2	everquest2.com
Ryzom	ryzom.com

I can buys powerz plzzz

These kinds of games are the worst offenders. They make no effort to balance the gameplay between free and paid players. Often in such games you can straight up buy power, better weapons, better stats, and all stuff that the lowly free gamers don't have access to.

A quick check is that if a game sells items in its store that are not available thought normal play—in a reasonable amount of time—then the game is pay-to-win. Mobile app stores and Facebook are littered with such games.

In these kinds of games, the free gamers are the product, they are the cattle out for the slaughter as the overpowered paying gamers get an ego boost by winning easily. Zynga is the biggest culprit here.

Sure they can still be fun, but if winning is the objective, then it is possible that you just cannot achieve that without paying, and then is the game free at all? We don't think so.

How to get more free games

You people are insatiable! Aren't fifty games enough for you? Well since you don't seem to have anything more productive to do, here are a few tips for how and where to get free games.

Web Games

Web games are usually free, as they are supported by advertisements. There are dozens of websites out there that have large collections of games that can be played within the browser itself.

The most popular website for this is probably Kongregate, but there are a few others you should be aware of:

- armorgames.com
- newgrounds.com
- ninjakiwi.com
- mochigames.com
- arcadeok.com
- overgames.net

A number of PopCap games are also available for free on their website popcap.com

Free Indie games

Every once in while you have competitions such as Ludum Dare where a number of game developers get together and compete to make the best game they can within certain constrains. The games that result from these competitions might not be the best, but often they are interesting and rather creative thanks to the limitations of time. The resulting games are often free.

Ludum Dare for example is a 48 hour contest, so one person has 48 hours to make a game! 7DFPS is about creating an FPS game in 7 days. Keep a look out for such competitions for interesting games.

Desura and ModDB

Desura is a game store that supports Windows, Linux and Mac. Not only that, it includes a large number of free games as well. This makes it easy to get the game, and also to keep it up do date with the Desura client.

Desura is also awesome for finding mods for games you already own. Even if you have not bought a game from Desura, it will let you download mods for other games, even some games it doesn't sell. ModDB is a sister site and brilliant for finding mods for games even Desura doesn't have.

Don't take mods lightly, often they can change a game entirely. Some of the most popular games today started off as mods. The recent Day-Z mod for Arma II actually spiked the sales of that game by 500%!

Visit *www.desura.com,* sign up and download the clients

Free Open Source Games

Open Source games can be found in any Linux distro and its repositories but discovering them for Windows is often difficult even though many of them are available for Windows.

The best way is to use Linux. OK, since you want an alternative, here it is, look through the list of game packages included in Linux distros. If you find a game, Google it, its website will often have a Windows or even Mac version.

What? You're getting a free game! Put some effort into it!

Here are some examples:

Name	Link
LinuxLive Gamers game list	http://dgit.in/MlRzv9
Ubuntu App Directory game list	http://dgit.in/NlTqOU
PlayDeb Linux gaming site	playdeb.net

Promotions and contests

Every once in a while someone will run a promotion or contest and give away a game for free. For example, Valve gave away Portal for free when they announced Steam for Mac.

A number of other games have been available for free for a limited time. GOG.com for example has given away Fallout, Empire Earth: Gold Edition and Broken Sword: Shadow of the Templars. All we can say here is keep a look out, and you might just be in luck.

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FREE STUFF FOR PC

Who doesn't like free stuff? It's impossible to stop loving free products, even if we're against piracy. It's human nature and very natural! Everybody expects good services free of cost, and why shouldn't we? We've already paid or are still paying for the PC system and its maintenance. Obviously this shouldn't be reason enough to promote and spread piracy. So we want stuff for free legally.

And what better way to do that than by enlightening you about the services and software products already available at no cost by default. They fall into the "freeware" category. The term was invented by Andrew Fluegelman – best known for his invention of the shareware business model for software marketing. In 1982, he developed his own software PC-Talk, a very popular and successful communications software, and he marketed it under a system invented by himself called "Freeware".

*think*di9it.com

He characterized the Freeware system as "an experiment in economics more than altruism". Since then, it has been licensed under terms that encourage users to make voluntary payments for the software, allowing users to copy and redistribute the original software freely. Freeware is so successful because it can be easily used as long as the user wants and the license terms and text can't be altered.

In this chapter, we'll discuss some of the best free software for PCs and direct you to places where you can get them. Software development has rapidly improved over the years and your array of options is only increasing by the day, with enthusiastic developers across the globe busy doing what they do best.

And before you think that only the big companies can provide good software, stop right there. Over the past few years, individual software developers, with their passion and talent, have come out with some of the best software around, enabling them to challenge even the biggest of companies nowadays.

So, what are your options?

Let's get started.

Secure your PC

In simple words, software is a collection of computer programs which leads the system to perform specific operations. Hackers are well aware of this and can conduct malicious programming activities to entirely spoil your PCs. That's why you must give the first priority to securing your computer. Security software protects your system from malware, computer viruses, backdoors, phishers and keyloggers.

Security software not only provide anti-virus or internet securities, but also advanced tools and applications – such as IP scanners, PORT scanners, firewalls, security alarms and network monitoring bots – to detect suspicious activity. So, let's start off with some of the best Freeware Security software around that you can use to secure your PC.

Avast! Antivirus

Avast! is a freeware PC security software program which provides an anti-virus and anti-spyware scanning engine. Well known for its faster protection, it also offers a web-reputation browser extension as well as virtualization technology. The software keeps your PC's security strong and updated to eliminate the various threats over the internet. It ensures

your safety while downloading freeware content, surfing, social networking and gaming.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/OzDFAQ*

Ad-Aware Antivirus

Ad-Aware is a free anti-virus solution that provides core protection for your PC against internet threats. It also provides real-time anti-malware protection, advanced threat-detection technology, rootkit protection, a scheduler and the power to keep you protected while working online. Simply put, it's a complete malware protection solution which also provides a built-in firewall and secure browsing protection.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/NqkGϒk*

PC Tools AntiVirus

PC Tools AntiVirus is freeware anti-spyware package which is designed to protect your PC from various known and unknown viruses, worms, trojans and other threats. It completely defends your computer system against spyware, adware, bots, keyloggers and other malware. It also monitors for malicious threats and activities and provides real-time protection against malware attacks.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/M4xWFV*

Malwarebytes

Malwarebytes is an anti-malware program which is based on some powerful new technologies designed to find, prevent and destroy malware infections. It's an easy-to-use anti-malware application available free of cost. Malwarebytes is well known for its powerful detection technology and removal capabilities. You must use it to keep your PC secure from malware attacks.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/LL1pXE*

K9 Web Protection

K9 Web Protection provides parental control and an internet filtering software system that ensures child protection on the internet. It has the strong ability to block adult and other offensive content. It prevents spyware infections, and can be used to monitor internet surfing activity. K9 Web Protection is well known for its porn blocking capability.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/NzAZ8x*

Autorun Eater

Autorun Eater was designed specifically to decrease the amount of malware attacks spread using the 'autorun.inf' method. The file (altered by hackers) masquerades as the file normally required to launch a program when you plug in removable media such as flash drives and external hard disks and infects your. Autorun Eater blocks and eliminates the execution of the autorun.inf file.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/NswBs1*

Online Armor

Online Armor is an online security software that ensures the protection of your PC against unwanted external access. It prevents hackers from accessing your computer, as it defends against malicious programming activity on your computer and protects you while you're making online banking transactions.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/Oci3Jx*

Advanced IP Scanner

Advanced IP Scanner is a free and powerful network scanner that locates all the computers connected in your wireless local network and scans their ports. It provides an easy solution to access various network resources such as *HTTP, HTTPS,* FTP and shared folders, and detect all the IP addresses on your Wi-Fi network.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/Sb8L5A*

iSpy

iSpy is a free surveillance software program which can be used to keep your physical services secure, as it uses your webcams and microphones to detect and record movement. It even records sound and ensures the safety of your various services with the help of 24x7 monitoring function and alerting services.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/OzFpde*

Maintain your PC

Your computer is now absolutely secure, and we hope that the free security suites recommended by us are protecting your computer system against internet threats, trojans, phishers, keyloggers and malware attacks. But, it's your responsibility to keep this security running successfully, and to

keep this protection turned on, you need to maintain your system well. The following software will help you do that.

Xleaner

Xleaner is a free clean-up utility with simple functions that allows you to remove junk files. You can eliminate all the internet browsing records on your computer such as internet history, cookies, cache, auto-complete memory of your browser, Windows temp folders, run history, search history, open/save history and recent documents.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/MlmϒSo*

Process Hacker

Process Hacker provides full control over all processes running on your computer system, letting you start, stop, pause, resume and delete. It doesn't matter whether the process is protected by rootkits and security software. Finding and terminating hidden processes is possible with the help of Process Hacker.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/P2dnuw*

Cobian Backup

Cobian Backup is used to schedule and back up your files and directories from their original location to other directories. You can even make the backup from other computers in your network. This program also supports FTP backup in both directions – download and upload.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/SbcS1p*

Recuva

Recuva is a freeware Windows utility that allows you to restore files that have been accidentally deleted from your computer. That means, it allows users to restore the files that are emptied from the Recycle bin. You can even restore images and other media files that have been deleted from digital camera memory cards or MP3 players.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/MlCfℱM*

PowerTools Lite

PowerTools Lite is a registry and system cleaning utility application that automatically cleans your Windows registry of temporary and useless data. It fixes many kinds of registry errors, such as broken

file references and removes unwanted history and most recently used (MRU) data.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/NnOMPl*

SpeedFan

SpeedFan is a maintenance utility application that easily monitors the voltage, fan speed and temperature in computers with the help of hardware monitor chips. It even shows hard disk temperatures. This utility fully supports small computer system interface (SCSI) disks.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/LL3EtO*

FixWin Utility

FixWin is a small-sized freeware portable application that repairs and fixes common Windows problems, annoyances and issues related to Windows products such as Windows Explorer, Internet & Connectivity, Windows Media Player and System Tools.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/P29Mwz*

Ultimate Windows Tweaker

Ultimate Windows Tweaker is a freeware portable tweaking and optimizing utility for Windows 7 and Windows Vista. You can use this portable application to customize your Windows requirements as per your needs. With easy customization, you can make your system faster and secure.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/M4znEi*

Update Freezer

Update Freezer Portable is a small freeware utility which helps you to temporarily disable different kinds of automatic software updates for Windows OS. You can simply undo this process in just a few clicks. It can even disable the automatic updates for products such Google, Adobe, Java, Firefox, Windows and Skype.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/PSoKrR*

Be Productive

What's next? Now it's time to get some work done on your PC with the help of Productivity apps. It's a category of software that helps users to complete specific jobs such as document presentation, database creation, word

processing etc. Productivity software helps the professional or common user in their everyday jobs.

OpenOffice.org

OpenOffice.org is an office productivity suite which runs on various operating systems. It provides desktop applications such as a word processor, spreadsheet program, presentation manager and a drawing program – each with an easy-to-use interface.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/NjCHf3*

Foxit Reader

Foxit Reader is a small sized and fast PDF reader, which allows you to open, view and print any sort of PDF file. Foxit Reader provides easy-to-use helpful features such as adding annotations, filling out forms and adding text to PDF documents.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/NjCLvo*

EditPad Lite

EditPad Lite is an easy-to-use and convenient text editor which allows you to open as many files at a time as you want with the help of the tab option. It allows you to convert between ANSI, ASCII and Unicode, and work with Unix and Mac files.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/N8xszV*

Notepad++

Notepad++ is a source code editor for programmers. It supports several programming languages such as C, C++, Java, C#, XML, HTML, PHP, JavaScript, batch file, ASP, VB/VBS, SQL, Objective-C, CSS, Pascal, Perl, Python, Unix Shell Script and many more.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/NOkEeN*

PowerISO

PowerISO is an easy-to-operate CD or DVD image

file processing tool that allows you to open, extract, create, edit, burn, compress, encrypt, split, convert and mount ISO files with internal virtual drive. It allows you to process almost all CD-ROM image files such as ISO and BIN.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/NjCWXs*

Orbit Downloader

Orbit Downloader is a freeware download manager useful for music and video downloading. The program allows you to download videos and music from YouTube, MySpace, Pandora, Last.Fm, etc that you're browsing in real-time on the internet.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/LL4DKL*

TeamViewer

TeamViewer provides free access for remote controlling of PCs, transferring of files, working online with others in a team, communicating via VoIP or video and chatting. You can even make presentations online.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/PSuuBI*

CamStudio

CamStudio is a freeware program which allows you to record all screen and audio activity running on your computer with an option to even create HD quality AVI video files. Its built-in "SWF Producer" can easily convert those AVIs into Streaming Flash videos (SWFs).

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/Oc5LAZ*

Easy Capture

EasyCapture is a flexible and straightforward free screen capture software for Windows, which allows you to capture anything running on the screen. It captures windows, objects, full screen, rectangle-selected regions, fixed size regions and scrolling web pages.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/M42Pu8*

Tor Browser Bundle

Tor Browser simply hides your identity on the internet. It prevents other internet users from tracking your network connection and prevents the

websites you're visiting from tracking your physical location. It also works like a powerful proxy server.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/NjrrMZ*

Communicate

It's great to see that you're enjoying those productivity apps on your PC. While working online with a team, you'll definitely need a mode of communication with them. There are freeware software that provide remote access to systems to exchange files and messages between different computers or users. Messages can be in any format such as audio, video, text or image. So, let's explore them!

Camfrog Video Chat

Camfrog Video Chat is a free application that allows you to join real streaming video chat rooms. You can hear, see and chat with many people at a time, provided of course, they're also online in that specific chat room. This program allows multi-user videoconferencing where up to 1,000 users can join at a time.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/Mlfm9b*

ooVoo

ooVoo is very good alternative to Skype services. It's an advanced way for people to communicate and connect online with its high-quality video and audio and multi-user capabilities. It allows up to six people to talk face-to-face with each other at the same time.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/Oc6XoO*

Pidgin

Pidgin is a multi-protocol instant messaging client for Windows, which is compatible with AIM, ICQ, MSN Messenger, Yahoo, IRC, and Jabber, Gadu-Gadu and Zephyr networks. You can log in to your multiple accounts simultaneously using Pidgin.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/NjrQPr*

Nimbuzz

Nimbuzz is a multi-platform IM application that allows you to chat with your friends on Nimbuzz, Facebook, Yahoo Messenger, Live Messenger (MSN) and Gtalk for free. You can connect your address book and share

unlimited photos with your buddies. Besides this, you can easily make unlimited audio and video calls using Nimbuzz.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/POFΥ7Z*

Mozilla Thunderbird

Thunderbird is an email client service specifically designed to prevent viruses and stop junk email. It provides you with faster and secure email sending facilities. The built-in RSS reader, spam filters and quick search feature enhance your mailing experience.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/Lb2rsR*

MetroTwit

MetroTwit is a very good Twitter client which brings out the best in Twitter with the help of simple features. As the name implies, its interface is based on Microsoft's Metro UI, which provides an elegant and clean user interface.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/LRgvGn*

Have Some Fun

Okay, you've already worked enough for your PC. You've done a fantastic job with our recommended freeware and now you have completed several responsibilities such as taking care of its security and maintenance. Now, don't you think you need some enjoyment? It's time to have some fun with your computer system. Here's how to go about it.

GOM Player

GOM Player is a freeware multimedia player application which comes with online video streaming capabilities and so many built-in popular video and audio codecs. So you don't need to install codecs separately. It supports various video file formats such as AVI, DAT, MPEG, DivX, XviD, WMV and ASF.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/M4EO69*

Avidemux

Avidemux is a freeware video editor for advanced users, and is designed for video cutting, filtering and encoding tasks. It supports various video file formats such as AVI, MPEG, MP4 and ASF using a variety of codecs. It comes with some powerful scripting capabilities that help users automate tasks.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/NjHkGa*

MediaMonkey

MediaMonkey is a media manager which helps you manage your varied collection of audio and video files with the help of customized categories. MediaMonkey organizes the media library for you in a way by which you can easily arrange your favorite audio and video files without any difficulties.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/NnWsBO*

Audacity

Audacity is a freely available editor which allows you to record and play sounds. You can even import and export WAV, AIFF, MP3 and OGG files. With the help of Audacity, you can easily edit your audio using cut, copy and paste features, mix tracks or apply effects to your recordings. It allows unlimited undo moves.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/NjsvR7*

aTunes

aTunes is a fully featured audio player which manages your music playlist. It comes with built-in ripping and encoding tools that create an automatic playlist of your songs, albums and artists. aTunes comes with 27 built-in skins, and supports Last.fm and various other internet radio stations.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/NOvTnE*

KaraFun Player

KaraFun Player is your home karaoke player which allows you to change the tempo and pitch of songs. You can even add some live effects and choirs. It's possible to record your performance, and even modify the background of the original lyrics. You can easily create some unique and funny karaoke files with the help of KaraFun Player.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/NjxmV9*

Hornil StylePix

Hornil StylePix is a freeware graphics editing program with built-in advanced features. It has been designed specifically keeping users with

no image editing experience in mind, and therefore has easy-to-use and convenient functionalities.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/NnGNSn*

The Bare Essentials

So, now we're coming to the end of our freeware tour. We explored a smorgasbord of free software that ensure the safety and security of your PC. The PC maintenance software helps keep your computer's security even stronger. Freeware also helps you do your office work, chat with friends or enjoy music and movies. Not enough, eh? Don't worry, because we have something more for you and your PC. Let's check 'em out!

Google Chrome

Chrome is a web browser by Google which is based on minimal design and sophisticated technology that makes the Web faster, more secure and easier to browse. Google Chrome is well known for its speed, as it's the fastest web browser in the world and supports HTML5.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/LbRFTe*

Mozilla Firefox

Mozilla Firefox is one of the world's fastest web browsers. It offers a secure and enhanced browsing experience to users. Firefox provides some helpful built-in features such as a pop-up blocker, tabbed browsing, integrated Google search box and simplified privacy controls. A streamlined browser window in Firefox allows you to get more content on a single page than any other browser.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/NlAboJ*

VLC Media Player

VLC is a highly portable multimedia player by VideoLAN which supports audio and video formats, ncluding MPEG-1, MPEG-2, MPEG-4, DivX, MP3, OGG, AVI and MP4. In addition, it supports DVDs, VCDs and various streaming protocols over the internet.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/LRxR5P*

Winamp

Winamp is a freeware multimedia player by Nullsoft which supports numerous audio and video formats. Over the internet, it even allows you to play various streamed video and audio content – be it live or recorded. It has its own customizable media library which allows you to burn your favorite music CDs.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/OzWΥtU*

CCleaner

CCleaner is a freeware utility which can be used to clean your Windows PC. It protects your privacy online and makes your computer system faster and more secure. Simply put, it's an optimization tool which removes unused files from your system and makes your Windows PC run faster than before. Additionally, it offers a fully featured registry cleaner.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/N515m7*

Skype

Skype is a very useful software which allows you to make free video calls anywhere in the world. The software is based on P2P (Peer-To-Peer) technology which connects you with other Skype users. With the help of Skype you can share your screen and can even make phone calls, but at a specified rate. You can even text chat with your friends using Skype.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/NeAfaz*

WinRAR

WinRAR is a powerful .rar archiver and archive manager, available for two versions of Windows (32-bit / 64-bit). WinRAR provides very strong features such as general and multimedia compression, solid compression, protection from damage and data corruption. It also processes ZIP and some other non-RAR archives, and scans archives for viruses and authenticity verification. It can unpack and convert CAB, ARJ, LZH, TAR, GZ, ACE, UUE, BZ2, JAR, ISO, Z and 7-Zip archives.

Download Link: *http://dgit.in/ObRC5l*

Daemon Tools

Daemon Tools is a virtual drive and optical disc authoring program which offers you user-friendly tools for making disc image files and emulating virtual CD/DVD drives. It supports various image formats to mount disc images to a virtual drive. With this, it's even possible to create .ISO, .MDS and .MDF images of CD, DVD and Blu-ray discs. Daemon Tools compresses and protects your images with the help of a strong password.

Download link: *http://dgit.in/ObΥU98*

How to Get the Best Freeware

As apparent by the term "freeware", free software doesn't require any payment for its usage. You should know though that free doesn't usually mean free for life. It indicates that you're using a trial version to evaluate a product or be enticed into buying a low-cost software program. So what are the best sources from which to download freeware collections? Read on to know.

SourceForge

SourceForge is a web-based Open Source code marketplace for software developers. It acts as a centralized place from which to control and manage free and open source software development. Software developers can access hosting tools to host their open source software. It's a convenient market place for open source freeware users who can easily search for them on the website. At the left-hand side, you'll find the categories of software such as Audio/Video, Business, Communications, Games, Graphics etc. At the right-hand side, there is a small list of Stadd Pics software which helps you choose from some of best apps. Its advanced search option offers five interesting options that help users find the perfect freeware for their PCs. The Translation option allows users to pick out the software in that specific language. Choose from English, French, German, Spanish, Italian, Russian, Dutch, Polish, Japanese, Portuguese, Swedish, Czech,
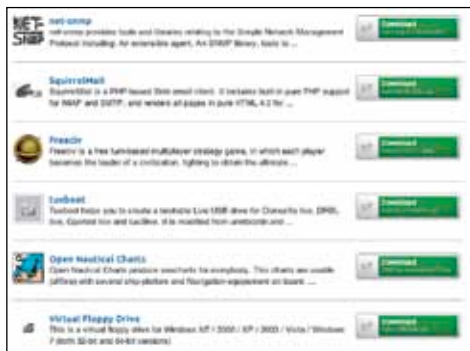
Hungarian, Chinese and Danish. Another option lets you choose a software with a particular licence. And then there's the option to choose an application which is based on a particular programming language including PHP. C++, JavaScript, Java, C, Python, Perl, ASP.NET, C#, Unix Shell, Assembly, PL/SQL, XSL, Delphi/Kylix and Visual Basic. It also provides you a Status category for your software with options such as Production/Stable, Mature, Beta, Planning, Pre-Alpha, Alpha and Inactive. We hope you won't choose that last option. As SourceForge is a multi-platform marketplace, you'll need to choose an operating system for which you are downloading those free software.

Visit: *http://www.sourceforge.net/*

Ninite

Ninite is a web service that allows users to automatically install more than one application at a time for their operating systems. You make a selection from a list of applications and it automatically bundles the selection into a single installer package. You can be certain you'll always have the updated versions of those apps. After installation, you just have to run the Ninite installer once to get any updates or later version of the software. The best part is that it works without any account and sign-up process. Ninite is currently compatible with Windows and Linux only.

Visit: *http://www.ninite.com/*

FileHippo

FileHippo is another web-based software downloads marketplace that offers freeware, shareware and open source software programs for the Windows operating system. At the homepage of FileHippo you'll notice various categories of software such as Audio / Video, Security, Messaging, System

tuning etc. Here you'll get the latest, updated versions of the best software from around the world. FileHippo never provides low quality or low security software, so we'll definitely recommend it. Note though that FileHippo doesn't allow you to upload or host

your programs or software on their server. It supports strong filtering which allows you to get software only from a specific category. Its download manager provides full support on stopping and resuming of downloads. It also provides its own utility tool known as Update Checker which scans your PC for old version software and automatically updates them to the newest version. At the bottom of the website, you'll find an RSS feed for updates, categories and some individual programs.

Visit: *http://www.filehippo.com/*

Phew... Programmers are writing free software and making it available to the wider world. And, when it will become popular, they'll be able to make some money by adapting the software on request. So, that's the secret to getting the best free software from around the world. But wait, there's one more avenue for free software. How could you forget our Digit DVDs bundled each month with some of the best free products and services around? The software we mentioned in this chapter are also present in this month's *Digit DVDs*. Enjoy...

FREE STUFF FOR MOBILES

Free software has always been the Holy Grail for software enthusiasts everywhere, but this has never been the case for smartphone/tablet users. As "apps" outpaced applications in demand, it became apparent that compressing everything into a package with only the most wanted features would be the way to go. And really, when you've cut away all that heft, why not just offer it for free? Developers have since found ways to profit off of developing free apps for users, but it also created a system where even normal users could develop their own apps.

But how does one get access to free software? Furthermore, a good number of features are supposed to be free but are "restricted" by some developers. A good number of people have taken to jail-breaking their iPhones for just this reason. Apple does have the largest app store, but some users might also want to install software that Apple wouldn't nor-

mally allow (a good many applications skip the iTunes Store if they don't meet Apple's requirements). Some users simply want try out new features; and others to exploit the full potential of their devices.

Android poured fuel on the fire by giving you the option to "root" your device and become the veritable system administrator. Standard mods and custom UIs thrive on adding new features, wallpapers and a totally new look to the experience. With Android being open-source, the possibilities are endless. Some custom mods, like the latest CyanogenMod, don't even require you to enable root access on your phone.

Rooting and jail-breaking paves the way

CyanogenMod allows for free custom themes, WiFi tethering, and much more.

for side-loading. Side-loading refers to the transfer of data between two locally connected devices and in all probability, the most potent use of side-loading is in transferring apps between users. Not only do you bypass data usage costs, but you can also share programs among your friends. With the increase in cross-platform apps, it's a great way to obtain new apps for one's device. In fact our previous Fast Track was entirely dedicated to this subject. Do pick it up if you wish to know more in depth.

The Best Cross Platform Apps
Any.Do
Released for Android in 2011, the award winning reminders app has finally made it's way to iOS. It's quite simple on the surface. Any.Do helps you organize your day, creating tasks and reminders based on priority. Creating and completing said tasks is easy, and even more so with the voice-activation software which faithfully captures one's voice without any problems. To top if off, you can download and sync Any.Do among multiple devices to keep track of reminders no matter where you go. You can also share your "to-do" lists with friends, because hey, the more the merrier for problem solving, right?

Evernote
It's not easy to throw up a free Office suite, especially one that is available for multiple platofrms like Blackberry OS, Windows Phone 7, Android and

iOS. But Evernote is just that, and more. Besides being able to create and edit text documents, you can also save webpages for later viewing. You can sync Evernote amongst multiple devices, collaborate on documents and notes with colleagues, arrange your itenaries and travel schedules and much more. Evernote offers a paid "Premium" account, but for the most part, all of it's features are free-to-use.

Google Chrome

This is a no-brainer. When it comes to online browsing, Google Chrome has emerged to become the most dominant browser across desktops (pockets of resistance are currently being suppressed). So why not for your mobile? With support for more than 31 languages, Flash, sandboxed tabs, switching tabs via swipe gestures and the familiarity we've all come to love, Google Chrome for mobiles is a must-have.

Instagram arrives on Android, bringing with it all the features and filters people love

Instagram

Filters ahoy! Instagram originally began as an iOS app, but has since made it's way to Android to the joy of hipsters everywhere. What more is there to say? Take photos and easily edit them with filters, effects and presets off the bat before uploading or sending them to friends.

Pocket/Read It Later

Anyone who's used their mobile on the train or various other dead zones will appreciate Pocket. Formerly known as Read it Later, it allows you to read articles and view videos offline. It also groups said article properly, even according to sources. You can choose whether to download text, or both text and images. For maintaining a nice bank or articles to read on the go, or simply to save on revisits, Pocket is the way to go, that is till Android and iOS come out with their own page-saving features.

The Best (mostly) Free Cross Platform Games

Amazing Alex

From the creators of Angry Birds and Angry Birds: Space comes Amazing Alex. It's a physics-based puzzle game just like Rovio's previous efforts, only offering more ingenuous solutions to the puzzles. The basic premise is to set off various chain reactions using the objects on screen to achieve a result. With 100 levels and the ability to create and share your own, Amazing Alex offers much by way of content. However, for those who want a simple trial run, it's good for a free play as well.

Amazing Alex from Rovio is a worthy successor to the Angry Birds franchise

Angry Birds Space

Does the Angry Birds franchise really need an introduction? Almost everyone and their grandmother has played this game at some point of time and now, you can do it in space! With all new physics and mechanics, Angry Birds: Space is a sequel to the hugely successful and insanely popular Angry Birds franchise!

Fruit Ninja Free

It may be old, but it's still one of the most fun and addictive mobile games out there. The premise is simple: You are a ninja. There are fruits. You must cut them. Combine this practice with combos, bonuses, cutting streaks and "bananas" that bestow varying effects like slowing down time and doubling points, and you have a great way to kill a few hours. There are 3 different modes to slash fruits in, including the Classic mode, which has you cutting fruit before they fall and avoiding bombs that cause an instant game over. Truly one of the must-haves of our ADD generation. On some platforms this game may be ad supported or with some restrictions.

Draw Something

Draw Something comes from Zynga, the brains behind Farmville and many other collection-based games that you receive annoying invitations

for on Facebook. The objective is to draw a picture for the other player, who must figure out exactly what it is you're trying to create. You have to choose between three "guess words", with the simpler ones netting fewer coins if guessed correctly and complex ones reward more coins but will be tougher to illustrate at the same time. You also get "bombs" which allows the guesser to rid himself of random letters unrelated to the answer, while the artist can use them for new sets of guess words. Draw Something caused a huge furore when it was first released, thanks to Facebook integration.

The Sims: Freeplay

For the hardcore gamers, there's the feature packed and immensely satisfying "The Sims: Freeplay" from Iron Monkey and Electronic Arts. It's essentially like maintaining your own virtual pet, except the pet is a human or "Sim". You can choose up to 16 different Sims, select professions and buy possessions for them, customize the town they live in and much more. What distinguishes this from other Sims titles is that the game runs in real time. So one hour of real time translates to one hour in the Sims world. The ability to purchase Lifestyle Points helps unlock new items, but you can earn them without having to spend a single paisa as well, making this one of the better free-to-play titles in recent memory for iOS/Android.

iOS Exclusive Free Apps
Highlight

Imagine being able to learn if people with common interests are around you, and that too in an offline environment. Highlight is capable of just that. It'll alert you to Facebook individuals and other Highlight users. Billed for locating "interesting" people, it's perhaps best for locating friends in the vicinity. You can also bookmark users, in case you meet some one who's information you'll need again later.

Camera Awesome

If Instagram allows you to jazz up your pictures with all sorts of blown out filters and effects, then Camera Awesome does the same thing...only better and includes more features as well. While the former emphasizes on dressing up pics, Camera Awesome actually focuses on improving your photography. It lets you adjust focus and exposure separately, thus enabling shots otherwise impossible on the iPhone. It also provides relevant data on

the "rule of thirds" and placement level of your camera. Finally, you can "awesomize" photos, which essentially improves their quality by tweaking contrast, brightness and colour correction.

Tonepad

Described as "a bit like musical crack", Tonepad offers an easy albeit deep way to compose music. It utilizes a grid interface for composing loops and harmonies of music - you can even switch notes on and off in the process. Save, edit and upload your creations to your friends whenever you feel the need to faithfully render Daft Punk on a rainy Sunday.

Awesome Note

Awesome Note is an organizational tool that helps you keep track of personal notes, calendar dates, to-do lists and reminders. However, it excels by being one of the prettiest iOS apps, with a myriad of colours, images, fonts

Awesome Note's colourful interface masks a huge amount of functionality.

and more. Recent updates bring native iOS Calendar to play, and allow you to sync to the same, along with easy access to groups and note categories, Awesome Note just keeps getting better and better.

Dragon Dictation

An app for those who just want to speak out their text, Dragon Dictation is frighteningly accurate when it comes to transcribing audio. Whatever you speak will be converted into a text document, with the

underlying text available for copying or even posting via Twitter, Facebook and more. You can even issue commands like closing tabs and the like. Granted you won't be gabbing away to glory with a 100-percent accuracy but for a free app, Dragon Dictation is incredibly powerful.

Google Sky Map even works indoors

Android Exclusive Free Apps

Google Sky Map

Ever wondered what the night sky would look like - or knew what it looked like, but wondered what the heck you were looking at? Google Sky Map uses your device's orientation facilities to tell you just that. It outlines the names of planets, stars, moons, constellations and so much more, simply by pointing your smartphone/tablet up at the sky. The best part? It works indoors as well, in case you need to impress someone special without getting up.

RD Mute

Yes, this feature has already seen implementation within custom UIs. But for those who follow the stock Android experience, they'll appreciate RD Mute. Simply flip your phone face down to silence your ringing phone. You can even customize it so a text message is sent, indicating your busyness or inability to answer. Finally, you can add exceptions - contacts you don't mind taking calls from, even when busy.

WordPress for Android

It may not fully substitute WordPress on the desktop, but WordPress for Android comes remarkably close. It packs in app integrations, allowing you to share posts to other Android apps, allows you to add media freely while editing the size, and autosave functions. There's also the ability to edit comments, along with a revamped Edit button for modifying a post link, title, and much more as you work. It's even been optimized for tablets with the latest update. As a blogging solution, the latest version of WordPress should meet all of your needs.

Google Maps Navigation

Google Maps is great. That much has been acknowledged by our functioning society. Previous Google Maps apps have worked to simply bring the experience to smartphones and tablets. And while this was great, it pales in comparison to the new turn-by-turn voice navigation. Your smartphone can function as both as a GPS and a navigation device, calculating and recalibrating the amount of time your journey will take without using up too much data.

Lightbox Photos

Yet another image editing app? Well, yes, but as always there's more than meets the eye to Lightbox Photos. Interestingly, it features "one click" photo
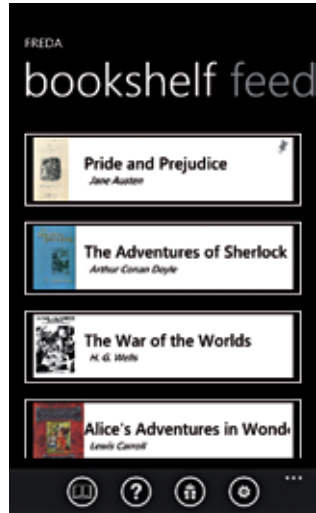
effects that will automatically adjust for colour, brightness, contrast as well as add filters as the photo is being clicked (rather than after). Each photos will also be automatically backed up online for safe keeping. It also works to integrate other camera apps for increased functionality. Finally, the social media functions are well done, with a stylish and intuitive design.

aDownloader

Does this need much introduction? A torrent client for Android, with pause and resume features for downloads. No limit on file size, support for the http protocol and with an easy to use interface. It may not be the most feature packed client of them all, but it's the go-to solution for Android users.

Windows Phone Exclusive Free Apps

Freda

A free eBook reader for Windows phone, Freda introduces a Metro-like interface, and the ability to backup and restore your "bookshelf" using SkyDrive. There's no longer advertising on the front screen either, for those who are concerned about the cover of their eBooks. You can now download multiple

Freda eReader's smooth and intuitive interface makes for an appealing solution to eBook reading

books in bulk and go into a low-memory usage mode for better performance. It supports multiple file formats such as FB2, HTML, .txt, ePub and more. You can also use annotations and bookmarks, as well as look up words in the dictionary. The number of features is almost too long to cover, and they're all available for free.

Nimbuzz!

Instant messaging will always be a strong reason for anyone looking to pick up a smartphone. Since it doesn't cost anything, people are looking at messaging apps like WhatsApp for their needs. Nimbuzz! looks to be the best possible messaging solution for Windows, with the ability to connect

several chat accounts together into one list, share pictures, presence management, messaging typing indicator, and much more. And of course, free chatting without any typical daily SMS limits. What more could you want?

Wiztiles

One of the sweeter features of Windows 7 on smartphones was the LiveTiles UI. It not only helped set it apart from Android and iOS, but was intuitive to use and pick up. Wiztiles expands on this further, allowing you to create custom tiles and themes. Updates have brought about even more features such as 12 new themes, improved performance, themeless tiles and more. There's also a Pro version available, which allows you to save multiple themes at once as opposed to the free version which only lets you have one theme. Definitely a good deal for those who want more out of their LiveTiles experience.

Ask Ziggy

Siri replacements are a dime a dozen these days, but only a few actually manage to eclipse that voice assistant. Ask Ziggy actually pulls it off though, especially with the multitude of updates it's been receiving since it's inception. For example, Live Calendar has now been integrated, and the number of "query canceled" pop-ups has been reduced. Yelp! support has also been added, though how far this would be useful in India depends on the site itself. And anyway, searching tweets by topic through voice is a great feature that presents a range of possibilities.

PrimeTube

You could view Youtube through the typical web browser, maybe use the YouTube app. Or you could utilize PrimeTube, which comes with a slick interface and allows easy access to favourites, playlists, uploads and more. Transitioning through pages is fast while options for HD and SD are also available. Not only is it free, it also lacks advertisements!

Blackberry Exclusive Free Apps
Blackberry Messenger

Anyone who owns a Blackberry will have this installed already - and it's the reason many people pick up a BB device to begin with. Yes it's a messaging/chat app, like so many others now available. You can start group chats, share photos and videos, and more. However, what sets BB Messenger apart is

it's security and encryption capabilities, with reach that's gone beyond the typical office types.

Blackberry Protect

Another security service, only this time recently introduced from the folks at RIM. Blackberry Protect works to back up all your information wirelessly. This includes contacts, bookmarks and much more. You can also password protect and encrypt your Blackberry device to prevent any unscrupulous hands from getting to it. BB Protect also includes a feature to find your device should it get lost, but the best feature is being able to transfer all your info to a new Blackberry device. Couple this with the synchronization of BB Protect across multiple devices and it makes for the ideal solution for a family of BB users.

Viigo

Need to stay up to date on all the latest news and views, across multiple fields? Viigo remedies that. You can add modules for keeping up to the date on sports, business, weather and much more. If you lean away from the typical updates on news though, Viigo allows you to add custom mod-

Photo Studio is no slouch in offering a range of image editing tools for Blackberry

ules for podcasts, entertainment - which includes books and movies - and social networks. If you need more customization, you can even add alerts for various keywords and track packages too.

Photo Studio

Every OS has it's own image editing software, but Photo Studio for Blackberry trumps this by not only providing a means to click pictures, edit them and add effects, but also to stitch everything together in the end. So if you have multiple images and want to make a visual collage you can. Photo Studio has a sizable number of filters, resizing options and much more.

A Pro version is available, but you can still pick up the free version to test drive the basic features.

Blackberry Travel

Blackberry Travel has finally made it's way to India, and brings a complete solution for planning, booking and executing travel plans. BB Travel works well, with it's notifications system that lets you know about any delays or cancellations. It also contains tools for booking hotels, currency conversion, weather and local search. You can also upload your travel information for friends to see. Best of all, if anything important is missing within your itinerary, it will provide suggestions to remedy this. As an all-in-one tool for traveling, Blackberry Travel works surprisingly well and comes highly recommended.

FREE SOFTWARE FOR TABLETS

iPad exclusive software

In general when we compare iPad apps on the Apple App Store with their counterparts on the iPhone, one thing is very clear: the apps for a tablet are more expensive. But lucky for Apple's policy of maintaining a good proportion of free apps on the store, there are many free apps that cover a range of requirements on the App Store.

Air Video Free

Many people actually complain about the iPad screen's 4:3 aspect ratio, but there is no disputing the fact that it is still an amazing device for simple watching videos. Where is probably lacks is storage space and its

Watch streaming videos on your iPad through Air Video

not easy to maintain large collections of video. This is where Air Video comes to the rescue. It lets you to stream video while if required it converts it in real time, directly from you computer. The limitation of the free version though is the fact that it will only show a few items which are picked randomly from each folder or playlist.

Beatwave

Start mixing and grooving with Beatwave on iPad

Beatwave is a modified synth app that lets you quickly create tracks and melodies by merely prodding a grid. There are multiple layers and numerous instruments to provide a range of complex compositions. You can save your sessions and store them or share them via email. There are also options to be able to buy more instruments and sounds within the app.

The Comics app on the iPad

Comics

The iPad's screen is big and enough to show an entire page in a comic book, unlike phones where you need to zoom and scroll to be able to read properly. And you can always find loads of free comics available within the in-app store that is bundled into the app.

Dictionary.com

Dictionary again seems like a standard app but whats commendable is

a really smooth and slick interface compared to even websites. The best part is it works offline and you don't need to be online giving you very quick access to millions of words and thesaurus items really fast.

Dictionary app for the iPad

Dropbox

Dropbox is an absolutely brilliant service now with support on almost all platforms letting you sync files instantaneously across multiple devices. The iPad app for dropbox is similar to its iPhone counterpart and lets you preview many file types and save them as favourites locally on your device.

Dropbox iPad app

Evernote

Very similar to Dropbox is another application for syncing and keeping track of ideas. Evernote is a free service for saving and syncing text documents, images and clips across multiple devices. It is very similar to its iphone counterpart but the large iPad screen lets you see more and navigate through your data more easily.

Evernote on the iPad

Feeddler RSS Reader for iPad

Feeddler is very simple and straightforward as an RSS Reader for the iPad and it can also be linked with your Google Reader account. It is very resourceful and fast letting you even store text offline, and browse by feed. It comes with a browser built-in, so you will not have to switch to Safari to visit any link.

Stunning images on the Guardian Eyewitness

The Guardian Eyewitness

This is an amazing app for witnessing eye-catching photography. The Guardian Eyewitness gives you a daily visual representation of global events. You are provided with access to the hundred most recent photos and they can be viewed in full screen. You can also save these photos to your iPad and share them via email.

iBooks

Going head on with the Kindle is iBooks, Apple's own in-house ebook reader app. It is also backed by the iBookstore which also has adequate free books to purchase. The best part is the adjoining iTunes University where you can do many courses from reputed universities for free. In accordance with apple standards, the interface is very refined, with handy cross-device bookmark syncing, highlighting, and various display options. It's also a capable PDF reader, for your digital magazine collection.

iBooks

IM+

All the chatting at one place

The new verisons of the iPad to allow you multitasking upto a certain extent, but it is still not easy to juggle between numerous IM clients to chat with friends. IM+ is a good alternative to that, letting you to run a number of IM services in a single app, and there's also a built-in web browser for checking out links and not

having to open it again in the Safari browser.

Kindle

Amazon's Kindle iPad app for reading myriad books available at the Kindle Store is not as easy as it is in iBooks. Here you buy have to buy books and get free purchases from the Safari

Kindle on iPad

browser and then sync these with your Kindle app through the internet. None the less Kindle is fine for reading, and you get options to optimise your experience and also comes with the ability to mark pages and sync them across other devices including the kindle and android kindle app to read from the same place on multiple devices.

PaperDesk Lite for iPad

This is effectively a digital notepad, which lets you combine typed words, scribbles and audio recordings in user-defined notebooks. The individual pages can be emailed as a PDF, although the free version lets you send only three pages per notebook.

Edit blogs on your iPad

Twitterrific for Twitter

The Twitterrific app fpr the iPad was a fresh reboot of the original mobile app. The producers decided to go back to the basics and get a simpler form out rather than the complicated app it had turned into. On iPad, it was reworked into a simpler form and has become a great and simple usable Twitter client. It also provides for multiple account functionality through IAP.

Wikipanion for iPad

The Wikipedia website works brilliantly on Safari, but this app make navigating much simpler and faster. Another app which does the same

Online shopping on iPad

well is Simplepedia. It comes with an efficient two-pane landscape view with excellent bookmarking and history access.

eBay for iPad

The eBay for iPad app is so good you will not want to go back to use the basic system on a web browser ever again. It's fast and efficient and very aesthetically showcases important details and images in its main results view. The app also gives you sorting and drag-based definition of price-ranges.

Google Earth

Probably not a very smooth running app and it also lacks few of the features available on its desktop alternate, but Google Earth is really pleasurable to use on an iPad. You can intuitively use touch gestures to move around the planet, and the optional layers let you display as much or as little ancillary information as you wish.

Rj Voyager

If you are a budding iPad DJ, Rj Voyager lets you to choose from a selection of bundled tracks, turn parts on and off and edit parameters in real-time via an intuitive, futuristic interface. Play through headphones or a decent sound system and the result is amazing.

Epicurious

Tens of thousands of recipes at your fingertips (as long as you have a web connection) ensure Epicurious is worth a download for the culinary-inclined. The app even composes a shopping list for recipes; it's just a pity it doesn't include measurements for those of us who use that new-fangled metric system.

WordPress

The official WordPress app for the iPad has traditionally been slightly slow and buggy, it's still good enough for authoring blog posts while on the move. It also comes with both text-based and visual approaches to crafting posts, so you don't have to be stuck with HTML.

Free Android Tablet Apps

Kindle for Android

Android tablet can be an amazing e-reader, along with the Kindle for Android application which brings Amazon.com's collection of more than 750,000 digital books directly to your device. The app lets you purchase books any time you have wireless connectivity and read whenever you have battery life. There are multiple classic books which are free, and all the best-sellers are available soon after their release at prices less than the print version internationally. You can preview books before buying and read them on multiple Kindle devices, thanks to the app's Whispersync technology, which transfers bookmarks and other annotations between devices.

Amazon Appstore for Android

Google's official Android Market is a really good place for getting great apps, but there are also many third party alternates to the same. Amazon's Appstore is one of them. Probably not the best Android Market alternative but it provides a number of unique features and offers, including a new, normally paid app for free every day, and a cool Test Drive feature for trying out new software.

Amazon MP3 and Cloud Drive for Android

Amazon MP3 for Android is a must-have application for all mobile media enthusiasts. With simple navigation and a clean user interface, Amazon MP3 for Android makes it easy to find and purchase the songs and albums that you seek, over Wi-Fi or your cellular network. Free "Songs of the Day" mean

you can frequently download new music without ever dropping a dime. And "Daily Deal Albums" are always available for $5 or less. The app also gives you access to all of you Amazon Cloud Drive music, via a cool, mobile Cloud Player interface.

Upload music to the cloud and play on multiple devices

Poynt for Android

Poynt is the only mobile, local-search application for Android you'll ever need. The app uses your current location, based on GPS or user-input, to find the closest businesses, retailers, restaurants, gas prices, events

Poynt for Android

and much more. Poynt offers a dedicated weather section, too. You can find local movie theatre listings and purchase tickets via Android. And the app integrates with your Google calendar and address book so you can quickly add contacts or events.

Twitter for Android

Any and all Twitter users with Android devices should download the most popular Twitter app on the Market: the official Twitter for Android app. The software boasts an intuitive and visually appealing interface&though not exactly optimized for tablets. More advanced, feature-packed apps exist-like Seismic for example-but Twitter for Android provides all the basic Twitter functionality you'll need for free, with no ads.

Dropbox for Android

Dropbox, a cloud-based storage service, makes it quick and easy to share files between Web-connected devices, including PCs, tablets and smart-phones. Dropbox apps exists for all major mobile platforms, and you get 2.0 GB of free storage just for creating an account-more if you recommend the service to others. You simply load up your Dropbox with content, launch the Android app and everything within your Dropbox is available to you via tablet. You can also upload new content while on the go.

Various Angry Birds Titles

Angry Birds is probably one of the most legendary gaming titles of mobile devices. No matter what platform you choose, you've likely seen the phe-nomenon that is Angry Birds. Though originally only on the iPhone and not all levels available in its free versions, it eventually was ported to most major mobile platforms.

Firefox

Firefox is now an optimised browser for tablets as well as smart-phones, Firefox offers a very good alternative to the default Android browser

and know with the fray of Chrome also into the mobile browser space, these browser apps allow bookmark and open tabs syncing across multiple devices for increased ease and seamless browsing.

Comics

ComiXology's app is a combined comics store and reader app. It is probably the only app that offers titles from both the Marvel Comics and DC Comics universes. It has a wide variety of titles that you can browse through and buy within the app itself. The reader's "Guided View" technology works well for finding your way through cells.

Google Books

Google Books is a tablet window to Google's cloud-based e-books service, where you can shop for e-books to read across multiple devices, or choose from a wide selection of free titles just like the kindle app and Amazon store

IMdB Movies and TV

This app gives access to the world's biggest database of film and TV information and works really well on Android tablets. It lets you to browse the database and watch trailers. Though there is a US centric focus of the app, it is still very useful for English movie buffs.

Zinio

There is an ever increasing number of magazines that are launching their own stand alone apps for the iPad, but not for the Android tablets. One good way to plug the gap is Zinio, which sells digital replicas of a large range of magazines from its in-app store on the android tablet.

Blood & Glory

Glu Mobile's take on the Infinity Blade game for the android is really commendable. It's a brilliant Android game with great tablet experience, unlike its inspiration. And its a freemium title, so you don't have to pay to initially play it.

Onlive

This amazing games streaming app turns your Android tablet into a fully-fledged gaming console. If you choose to purchase the full version it lets you use your tablet as a joypad peripheral. But the drawback is you would

need a really good Wi-Fi connection and this is technically very impressive. Now there is also a growing catalogue of games for you to to have fun with.

Mindjet for Android

If Evernote and Catch are more about notes, Mindjet is more about richer brainstorming sessions, making good use of the large tablet screen to organise your thoughts and make them understandable for future reference.

Skitch

This is Evernote's second app adding to its features and improving the list of functionalities. It also brings in more fun, letting you scribble on photos and images to annotate them. It's very easy to use, and you can have fun commenting on friends' photos and work applications too. Similary Adobe's Photoshop Touch app brings powerful image-editing to Android as well.

Google Sky Map

Google Sky Map is currently being let loose in a good way where Google is making it open source –but it still has its own in-house Sky Map app up for grabs on the market. You can hold your tablet in the air, and get an instant guide to what all those stars are called. The search mode which is very handy is good for planet-spotting too.

SKETCHBOOK PRO

SketchBook Pro is Autodesk's painting and drawing app for android tablets. It newer versions for the Honeycomb tablets have been finetuned to work brilliantly and help you sketch on the tablet screen. Professionals may get the most out of it, but the app is fun and rewarding even for less artistic Android owners.

FREE
WEB APPS

From humble beginnings, the web has evolved into a massive, invaluable source of almost all things digital. It's our primary tool for communication, entertainment, productivity, news and social networks – and it wouldn't be wrong to call it the fabric that holds our (digital) lives together. What was earlier just a collection of hyperlinked web pages containing static text and images, the web has grown not just in size, but also in capabilities. Web pages used to be meant primarily for reading or viewing content. However, this trend has changed, with the web being used to read, write, listen, watch and create a wide array of digital content.

Newer web technologies have given the web an enormous amount of power and flexibility. Advances in HTML5, Javascript, WebGL etc., allow developers to create web applications that can rival the performance and

feature-set of many standalone desktop softwares. These web-apps allows the user to perform all common tasks such as editing documents, listening to music, watching movies, editing photos; all tasks that were earlier reserved for offline/desktop applications. These apps have ensured that a web browser is about the only piece of software you'll ever need on your computer. Whatever task you wish to perform, chances are "there's an app for that"

What are Web applications?

Web applications ('apps') are essentially applications that are stored on a remote computer called a server (the 'cloud') that can be accessed by connecting to this server over the internet. Each computer that connects to this server to use the web application acts as a client. However, this is not

an entirely accurate description, as advances in web technologies have allowed us to create standalone, offline applications that can be run entirely within a browser. Hence, we can redefine a web application to mean any application that relies on web technologies and standards like HTML and JavaScript and usually runs inside a web browser.

Why Web Apps?

But why should you even consider them? After all, you've got a full set of desktop software for all your computing needs. Over the years, you've gotten used to a favourite music player, a favourite word processor or a preferred text-editor. When you've already got the set of tools for the job, why should you bother switching to web apps? Here's why.

1. **Reduced Costs** – A great deal of the web's success lies in its open nature. The web empowers everyone equally, which has turned it into a shared resource. No country or organization can claim to 'own' the web. Content is created by the same community of people who consume it, resulting in most of the web applications being made available free of cost. This gives an internet user access to thousands of completely free applications for his personal use.

2. **Better security, reliability, portability** – Most web-apps store your data in the cloud and require you to authorize yourself, either using a

traditional username-password combo, or a more modern (and more secure) OAuth procedure, where you use one of your existing (Google, Facebook, Twitter, OpenID) accounts to verify your identity. Rarely is data stored offline on the client device. This eliminates the possibility of unauthorized access to your data. Secondly, should your physical device get damaged or misplaced, your data is still secure on a remote server, and you can resume work from any other internet-connected device. Thirdly, storing data on the cloud eliminates the need to carry a physical device with you at all times, as you can access and modify your data on the go with your internet-enabled phone or any other device connected to the web. As an example, consider your email account. If you're using a webmail service such as Gmail or Yahoo!, you'll know that you can access the same inbox from any computer in the world, irrespective of your location, the device type (computer/smartphone/tablet) or your Internet Service Provider (ISP).

3. **Always Up-to date** – Since the application is stored on a remote computer, the software developer needs to provide updates only to this copy of the program. All clients that connect to this server, will instantly be presented with the latest version of the application, ensuring better features, performance and compatibility. In short, web-apps are always up-to-date, without requiring the user to explicitly update the app.

4. **Cross Platform** – The web is a huge equalizer in the digital world, and web standards are such that the nature of the device or the software platform being used to access the web is rendered irrelevant. The web remains the same whether you're using a top-of-the-line Windows desktop, an ancient Pentium machine running Ubuntu or an iMac. This allows developers to concentrate on a single version of the app without worrying about compatibility issues, while end-users are delivered a consistent experience across platforms.

5. **Better collaboration and better sharing** – The interconnectedness of the web encourages sharing, as a result of which it is highly suited for almost all forms of communication and collaboration. Whether you're working on a school project with friends, dividing work between your colleagues in order to meet deadlines, or simply wish to share a funny meme with your friends, web-apps will let you seamlessly collaborate, share and work in a distributed hierarchy. Apps such as Google Drive were built keeping this very requirement in mind.

We, at Digit love web-apps, so we've compiled a list of our favourite web-apps across several different categories. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but should take care of most common tasks one would perform on a computer.

1. Operating Systems:

Yes, you entire OS itself can be cloud-based. While we won't go so far as to call it an 'app', there are several popular cloud based OSes that provide a complete desktop experience with rich web integration.

a. **Chrome OS** – Launched by Google in 2009, the Chrome OS was intended to be a complete web-based replacement to the traditional desktop OS. It came pre-loaded on low-end notebooks called Chromebooks, and offered an interface to the Google Chrome web browser. Based on the Linux kernel, Chrome OS offers refreshingly fast boot times of under 15 seconds, and traditional applications are replaced by HTML5-based web apps. Though it initially used a browser-only approach, future builds of Chrome OS included more 'traditional' elements such as a floating window manager, a file manager and a dock for commonly used applications. An open source variant called Chromium OS (*http://dgit. in/Mtx27Υ)* is available for download.

b. **Jolicloud OS** – Jolicloud (*http://dgit.in/SBeiSW)* has been around for a while, and it offers a convenient 'dashboard' to manage your apps, along

The Jolicloud OS Dashboard

with a built-in social network that lets you share your apps and see how your friends are using the OS. It uses your Dropbox or Google Drive account as a filesystem, so all your files are always backed up and stored on the cloud. All popular web apps are supported, and you can try out the OS from within your cur-

rent browser to see if it suits you. There are clients available for iOS and Android, so you can take your apps and data with you wherever you go.

c. **EyeOS** – Eye OS (*http://dgit.in/NDmxce)* is an enterprise level cloud OS that offers excellent security, lower operational costs and better collaboration for teams. Available as an Open Source version or a proprietary Professional Edition, its increasing popularity in the corporate

world is reflected by the fact it has seen more than 1 million downloads of the Open Source version.

2. Music and Internet Radio:

We all have enviable collections of MP3s scattered across our computers, external hard drives, portable music players

EyeOS is popular with enterprise customers

or smartphones. However, with unlimited broadband access becoming the norm, music streaming has become a viable alternative. It threatens to replace the current model of buying CDs or paying per song or per album. Most services will stream an unlimited amount of music for free, while some may charge a nominal charge. Add to it the ability to store a log of your listening history, 'like' your favourite tracks and see what your friends are listening to, music streaming is here to stay!

a. **Grooveshark** – The most popular music streaming service in India is certainly Grooveshark (*http://dgit.in/NwJdOt*) . While superior alternatives like Spotify, Rdio or Slacker Radio exist in the west, they are unable to offer their services to Indian customers due to licensing constraints. Grooveshark (ENTER LINK) doesn't need you to create an account to stream music, but with a free account, you can create and store playlists for future use. Grooveshark has a massive selection of songs and videos, so you're unlikely to be disappointed. A desktop application (that runs on Adobe AIR) is available along with mobile apps for iOS (requires jailbroken device), Android, Blackberry, Symbian and WebOS devices. However, these are only available if you subscribe to the Grooveshark Anywhere service, at $9/month.

b. **8tracks** – If you're tired of playing DJ all the time, or love discovering new artists based on your genre of choice, 8tracks (*http://dgit.in/MrqXoL)* is the way to go. The

Grooveshark lets you stream the music of your choice

service lets users create playlists, which can then be shared with the rest of the community. Playlists are categorized using tags, so you can pick one based on an artist, a song or even the occasion or your mood. It lets users stream an unlimited number of tracks, but only lets you skip 3 tracks every hour. You won't know the contents of a playlist before you start to play it, so this one's sure to keep you guessing. Official mobile apps are available for iOS and Android, along with third-party clients for Windows Phone, WebOS and even a Chrome extension, thanks to excellent developer support.

c. **Saavn** - Though the above services are excellent, they're not customized for Indian listeners. Saavn (*http://dgit.in/LsDt9R)* solves this problem by

Saavn streams music in many Indian languages to your desktop or mobile device

providing free Internet Radio in 4 Indian languages - Hindi, Marathi, Telugu and Tamil. The music library is quite exhaustive, including songs from the 70s and the 80s along with contemporary Bollywood songs. Without a doubt, this is the best service for listening to popular Indian music for free. The service offers mobile apps for Android and iOS devices, so you can take your music with you.

d. **TuneIN-** While the above services either let you pick the songs you like or listen to random artists to expand your musical horizons, they're essentially online playlists playing back song after song. If you fear missing out on an 'authentic' FM experience with an RJs banter, TuneIN (*http://dgit. in/M3iibt)* is here for you. TuneIN basically streams local radio stations from the world over (including popular Indian radio stations such as Big FM, Radio One and Radio Mirchi from different parts of the country). So if you're away from home and missing your favourite local radio station, this excellent web app also includes apps for Android, iOS, Windows

Phone, Blackberry, Bada and Palm devices. A paid subscription to TuneIN Radio Pro lets you record audio streams as well.

e. **Last.fm Player** - Last.fm is an excellent social network that lets you reach out to people with similar tastes, it also includes a Last.fm radio that can stream your (or someone else's) Last.fm library to your desktop or mobile device. The first 30 songs are free, but you'll have to pay to use the service after that. But if you're not looking for a full-blown, feature filled music streaming app, the Last.fm free music player (*http://digit. in/SBfNAK)* may suit you just fine. It's a Google Chrome extension that simply plays whatever song you point at it from the Last.fm website. You can enqueue tracks for later, and it'll even scrobble your tracks back to your Last.fm account.

3. Office / Productivity Suites:

a. **Google Drive** - Formerly known as Google Docs, Google Drive (*http:// dgit.in/NDmXPU)* offers not just an office suite, but an entire online file-system and lets you store 5 GB of data for free, and the files created within Google Drive don't count towards the storage. It comes with built in file previews for different types of files, including images, compressed archives, and popular media formats. The office suite itself is full featured, allowing users to create, edit and view documents, spreadsheets and presentations. What really shines through about Google Drive are its collaboration features, allowing users to easily share and concurrently edit or comment on a document. Desktop and Mobile clients for Mac OS X, Windows, Android and iOS are available, with a Linux port allegedly in the works.

b. **Zoho Office Suite** - Zoho is the Swiss Army Knife of web applications. This venerable Open Source offering from India boasts of a productivity suite including a Notebook, Planner and Calendar in addition to the standard document (Writer), spreadsheet (Sheet) and presentation (Show) tools. Along with this, Zoho (*http://dgit.in/NyeZga)* also offers a host of enterprise-specific business tools to cover practically all of your business's managerial tasks.

4. Image Editors / Photo Management:

While Adobe Photoshop may rule the roost on the desktop, its steep price is a put off for many. Besides, most of us are unlikely to require the full blown power of this tool for everyday photo editing tasks, and

a simpler, more intuitive and free alternative comes in the form of web apps. Luckily, there's no shortage of these, but we've picked out a few for you to start off with:

a. **Picasa Web Albums / Google+ :** If you already have a Google account, then storing your photos on Picasa Web Albums (*http://dgit.in/Mrqϒcy)* should be a no-brainer. You can create dedicated photo albums in Picasa, (or you can choose to store them in a folder in Google Drive), tag people or places in the album, share it with others either via email or Google+. Both Google+ and Picasa now allow some basic photo editing functions, courtesy Google's acquisition of Picnik. You can crop, resize, sharpen and rotate images, fix colour or exposure problems, apply filters, captions or even some funky effects like moustaches or crowns!

b. **Aviary:** While Aviary is an internet suite of applications for image, web and audio files, their best-known product is the Image Editor called Phoenix (*http://dgit.in/NDnbOv).* It allows for several common fixes to your images, with features including different sized brushes, a magic wand, a fill tool and many other tools that have become standard with image editors. The web-app requires Java to run, but apps are also available for Android and iOS devices.

Pixlr provides a familiar looking interface for an image editor

c. **Pixlr** - Pixlr (*http://dgit.in/ MtxRxz)* provides probably the most familiar looking interface for those who're used to working with Adobe Photoshop or GIMP. You get a palette of tools on the left, your image in the center and smaller windows for layers, navigation and history on the right.

5. Chat / IRC clients:

Instead of having a dedicated client for every chat protocol like Google Talk, Facebook Chat or MSN Messenger, these web apps allow you to club together your various online accounts under one app and manage your conversations in a neat way. Meebo, a very popular IM client was discontinued after its acquisition by Google earlier this year, so we chose not to include it in this list.

a. eBuddy (*www.ebuddy.com)*

b. Imo.im (*www.imo.im)*

c.   Nimbuzz (*www.nimbuzz.com)*
e.   Mibbit (*www.mibbit.com/)*

Mibbit is a free IRC client

6. Miscellaneous:

For those nifty little utilities that don't really fit under a specific category, we've compiled some great (and free) web-based tools for you:

a.   **Ge.tt** (*http://ge.tt/)*- Dead simple, drag-and-drop file sharing.

b.   **Springpad (***www.springpad.com***)*- Online Notebook for managing your notes and organizing your work.

c.   **Keepvid** (*http://dgit.in/O1IPIm)* - Download Youtube videos in a variety of formats and resolutions

d.   **My Fonts (***http://www.myfonts.com/WhatTheFont/)* - Identify fonts you see on websites

e.   *www.online-convert.com* - Convert between various different file formats.

f.   *http://10minutemail.com/10MinuteMail/index.html* - Create a disposable email account

g.   *http://www.compassionpit.com/* - Vent your frustrations anonymously, and seek help from other anonymous users

h.   *http://www.ptable.com/* - An online, interactive Periodic Table of Elements.

i.   **myfav.es** - Build a customized home page for your browser

j.   *www.runpee.com* - Find out the best time to pee during a movie, without missing anything important.

FREE DOMAINS, FREE HOSTING

B e it a student, web-professional, company, hobbyist, artist or a developer; in today's dotcom led world, everyone needs a website and web-presence. But, renewing your hosting-service service and domain-name every year can be a little heavy on your pockets especially if your sites are not monetising. So, should you not make a website? We would say, you certainly should and if going through all these payments is a problem, we would suggest you to go for some free web-hosting services and free-domain names.

There are plenty of free web-hosting service providers in the market today and you will see a lot of them with just one google search. But, are these all actually free? Some of them need you to post of their forums every fortnight,

some load your website with pop-ups and advertisements; others ask you to add a script to your web-pages which helps them monetise. So, many are not completely free; but are as free as possible!

Of the big pool of free web-hosts, below are the few popular ones that give you a good share of features in zero cost:

Zymic
(http://www.zymic.com/)

It is one the most popular and highly user-rated free web-hosting service providers.

Pros

The major advantages include no advertisements and free sub-domain names. You can choose your domain name among a range of choices such as 99k.org, zxq.net, zymichost.com, etc. or it also provides you to buy your own domain and host your site using this service.

It provides you 6 GB disk space per account with unlimited account per users and 50 GB of monthly data transfer which is good enough space and bandwidth, if you don't have a high traffic website to be hosted.

It's a very developer friendly hosting service as this supports supports the latest version of PHP and upto 3 MySQL Databases. It provides FTP access and unlimited number of accounts. It provides you a control panel with basic features and above all this you have a decent free support.

Cons

Though it provides you a control panel, it doesn't provide you with auto installer scripts like Elefante or Fantastico for automatic one-click installation of WordPress , Drupal, Joomla, etc. You will be required to install these manually from FTP and thus is not a very good choice for non-technical people. They do not provide any instant site-builders or templates to help you start quick and thus we recommend Zymic for people who are comfortable in making applications and websites and are looking for complete freedom from a free web-hosting service.

000Webhost
(http://www.000webhost.com/)

It is another popular service for free web hosting which is Ad-Free.

Pros

OOOWebhost has a major advantage of providing Fantastico Script installer with 10 popular Scripts which Zymic does not. The premium version of OOOWebhost provides almost 50 auto-install scripts. It provides you with 5 Add-On Domains and 5 Sub-Domains, along with 5 email addresses. it provides 1.5GB Space and 100GB data transfer and thus may be preferred for high traffic website with less storage space required. It provides you a cPanel with limited features and upto 2 MySQL databases and PHP along with FTP access. And over all this, you website always remains Ad-Free!

Cons

It has No actual support from the service provider and all help comes from a hardly active forum. Some users have faced difficulties in updating platforms such as Wordpress automatically . Once , this service provider banned free users from using the backup tool and prompted them to upgrade to premium accounts. Also , it provides you with only 1 FTP Account as compared to unlimited FTP accounts provided by Zymic.

Thus, OOOWebhost is good for single users who do not need multiple FTP accounts and as there is limited support , we do not recommend this for people who are not technically sound.

XtreemeHost
(http://www.xtreemhost.com/)

XtremeHost is another free-web host which provides you only hosting but not a free sub-domain as Zymic does.

Pros

It provides you with Web Space of 2500 MB and a Monthly Bandwidth 100 GB. It provides a limited MySQL Space of 50 MB and 10 Add-on Domains and 10 Parked Domains. It allows you to create 10 MySQL Databases as compared to 2-3 of services discussed above. It also completely Ad-Free.

Cons

The major drawback is the File Size Limit to 4MB and no Uptime Guarantee. It does not provide you with Script Installer such as fantastico etc. With just 1 FTP Accounts and restriction on Audio or Video Streaming for free accounts,

Xtremehost does not come out as a very preferred choice among developers. It doesn't provide any webmail services.

Freehostia
(http://www.freehostia.com/)

Freehostia also offers free web-hosting service with a very popular Control Panel.

Pros

It is Ad Free and provides you with an industry famous Hepsia Control Panel. Another major advantage is the +1-click App Install Script installer with about 40 Scripts.

Cons

It provides you very low Bandwidth of 6 GB as compared to other services discussed before and thus is not a very good choice for even medium traffic websites. The disk space provided is also small , upto only 250MB .Also it provides you with only 1 MySQL Database.

Weebly
(http://www.weebly.com/)

One of most popular free web-hosts with over 12 million people & businesses using it Weebly

is an all-time favorite for a lot of users, especially due to it's simple drag and drop website builder.

Pros

It provides you free subdomain of weebly.com and also allows you to host on your own domain. It provides you unlimited bandwidth and storage. It provides you with Drag & Drop Website Builder with almost 100+ Professional Themes . Used by millions world over, it has a Fast & Helpful Support System with even Email Support for Free Accounts. It provides you with Easy Blogging features and lets you quickly add Photo Galleries & Slideshows to your website. It allows Video & Audio Players and an Easy Form Builder Image Perfect Image Editor. Weebly gives you a Weebly Education Option which allows a Free account to manage up to 40 student websites. it also allows multiple administrators to edit the site .It also provides you detailed traffic stats.

Cons

You cannot Remove or Customize Weebly footer with a free account. Also, its not recommended for people who need FTP access and MySQL databases and need to run PHP scripts etc. Weebly is for personal and business websites who require easy interface and not for developers who want more control over their websites/apps.

Webs
(http://www.webs.com)

Webs is another popular service in the banner of Weebly. It provides similar features and a very powerful interface.

Pros

Webs provides you with powerful Site Building Tools and templates. It also gives you Search Engine Optimization (SEO) techniques which can help you increase the ranking of your website. it supports Mobile Sites. It gives you 24/7 Customer Support and Free Domain Name with Email Addresses. It also provides you detailed traffic stats and SEO Features as weebly does.

Cons

One major disadvantage is that Webs is not Ad-Free. Also, It does not provide unlimited storage and bandwidth as compared to Weebly. It supports upto 0.5GB Bandwidth and 40 MB Web Storage . It does not allow video Storage for free Accounts. It also does not provide FTP Access and running PHP Scripts .

Webs and Weebly are both used by business for E-Commerce websites and for personal websites and portfolios by general people.

Wix

(http://www.wix.com/)

Wix also falls into the category of websites that provide you free hosting with powerful website builder.

Pros

Creating your own website using wix is very easy using the powerful Wix drag and drop editor. All Wix websites are SEO optimized and have a mirror HTML site to help your website get better index

by Search Engines.You get up to 500MB of storage and up to 1 GB bandwidth. It supports mobile sites also.

Cons

Wix Free Accounts are not Ad-Free. wqix also does not provide FTP access and does not allow you to run PHP Scripts. It does not provide you detailed traffic stats when compared to Webs and Weebly. It does not allow you to have custom domain of your own.

WordPress
(http://wordpress.com/)

Wordpress is one of the most used free web-

hosting services for blogging especially due to its mind-blowing themes.

Pros

Wordpress gives its users an awesome blogging experience with the help of its free themes. It has up to 3GB of storage space and a decent interface to easily edit and customize features of your blog.It supports more than 120 languages and the sites made on Wordpress are easily accessible from mobile also.

Cons

Wordpress displays ads on websites and doesn't give any FTP access to its Freemium users. You cannot use wordpress plugins while using free account.

Google Blogger
(http://www.blogger.com)

Google Blogger is as popular as Wordpress but

lacks a little in the amazing looks that wordpress themes provide you.

Pros

It provides an easy interface and custom-built templates customized for blogging. It gives an option of group blogging and hence the blog can be authored by more than one individual. It gives up to 1 GB of storage space and supports up to 41 languages.

Cons

Similar to Wordpress, Google Blogger doesn't provide FTP access and also displays ads.

FREE EDUCATION

Inter-disciplinary education in our country is hardly heard of. After high school, the course structure you choose is pretty much what you're stuck with till you graduate. So unless you plan to drop out of one course, it's quite difficult to explore other subjects. For instance, it's very difficult for an engineering student to take a class in say Sociology or vice versa, because the courses are structured in such way that it leaves the student with no time.

But with the internet, that concern is behind us. Not only can you choose to pursue courses in the fields you like, but you can actually do a lot of them for free. And from some of the best universities in the world.

Free online education is easily available at the click of a button. So not only can you try out another subject to study and gain more knowledge, you can also find many alternate sources to help you understand your cur-

rent course material online. But just because it's online doesn't mean it's any less serious. You will have to go through a list of reading lists, assignments, etc. Let's take a look at some pointers before we begin looking for free online education.

▶ Commitment

As a society we're very used to a typical classroom type of a situation, where the lecturer is teaching and you're either taking down notes or just plain fooling around. You're confined to classrooms and have dedicated timings. With online learning, while the teacher is present, the timings are upto you. You can take the courses whenever you like, at your convenience. Now add zero cost to consuming these lectures, and there's a very high possibility that you may just randomly enroll for courses without really attending them. Beware!

It's very easy to get side-tracked while doing free online courses, as there's no monitoring mechanism. It's all upto you. You have to set aside time for the course. You have to persevere and study as if you were doing a local college course. You have to be committed for it to be successful.

▶ Aim for knowledge, not for a degree

One of the first questions that many people have about free online courses is, "Will I get a certificate after I finish the course?" The obsession for certificates has to stop if you want to gain knowledge. Sure, there are some online courses that offer course-completion certificates. But that shouldn't be your aim. Take these free online courses as an opportunity to get to know about fields which you'd never know about otherwise. For a student studying engineering, it's almost impossible to take up a course in the humanities in the Indian educational scenario, but in the online world, you have a range of disciplines at your disposal. You can gain immense knowledge from these courses provided with the right focus. Degrees and certificates, you're anyway getting from your real-world courses. Not getting one for the online course you did won't hurt. Your choice of course is purely to improve your knowledge on a subject, not to prove a point to anyone.

▶ Explore the course offline as well

Just attending an online lecture is not sufficient. Just like your regular college course, if you really want to get the most out of the free online course, you should invest in tools to improve your knowledge. Since the course is free,

the least you can do is invest in a reference book or visit your local library for an all-round view of the subject. If that course website has forums, actively participate in them and interact with other students from across the globe. Don't just limit yourself to the video or audio lectures from the course. Go out and explore the subject.

▶ Understand on your current college course

Free online courses are not just an addition to the course that you're already doing or have done in the past. They can even help you grasp concepts which you may not have understood in college. By visiting different online courses, you'll be exposed to different methods of teaching, and some methods may help you understand your school/college coursework better than others. How we wish there was a Khan Academy while we were in school. It would have made understanding Physics so much easier!

Free Online Education Resources

Now that you've got the preliminary pointers out of the way, the next step is looking for a free online course. The best way to go about this is to Google the term 'free online courses' and voila! It will link you courses galore.

If you're looking at a specific university's courses, then the best bet is to visit that particular university's website and search for the term 'open courses' or 'free online courses'. Beware that a renowned university won't offer all of its courses for free. If that was the case, there wouldn't be students running from pillar to post to procure enough capital to enroll in an international university. The courses offered for free vary from one university to another. Some of the courses may just be introductory ones, which will give you a basic feel of the subject. Still other places may offer courses in niche disciplines such as Cryptography.

We've selected a sprinkling of some of the best websites offering free online education.

Udacity
- ▶ Website: *http://www.udacity.com/*
- ▶ Universities Associated: None.
- ▶ No. of Courses Offered: 11
- ▶ Certifications (if any): Yes (Paid)
- ▶ Discussion Forums: Yes
- ▶ Video Lectures: Yes

We Say

Udacity is a private educational organization formed by Stanford alumni. It offers a limited number of courses across three levels namely: Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced. The idea behind the limited number of courses lies in the philosophy that Udacity plans to educate students in skills that can be immediately useful in the current job market. It's a haven for those of you who are big on building. So you have courses such as Building a Search Engine, Programming a Robotic Car, Crunching Social Networks, etc.

There are instructional video lectures. Each course is divided into a limited number of chapters, with each chapter having sub-chapters. The videos accompanying each sub-chapter are under 10 minutes in duration and some of the videos pose a question at the end to help you revise what was taught. An interesting touch.

It has a healthy community with which you can interact once you register on the site. You can earn certificates from the courses you've learnt by giving exams in the real world. Udacity has a tie-up with Pearson Vue which has offline testing centres. You'll have to pay for the certification though.

Coursera

- ▶ Website: *https://www.coursera.org/*
- ▶ Universities Associated: 16
- ▶ No. of Courses Offered: 111
- ▶ Certifications (if any): Yes
- ▶ Discussion Forums: Yes
- ▶ Video Lectures: Yes

We Say

This is a consortium of around 16 universities including Princeton, Stanford, and University of Edinburgh among others. They have a variety of disciplines on offer and each of the courses has a set duration – anywhere from 6 to 12 weeks. The program

A typical Coursera course structure

started this year, and you can already enroll for courses.

You'll get notifications in your mail box when the course begins along with the relevant reading material before attending the video lecture. Unlike other courses, the video lectures here are broken up into sizable chunks of time. So instead of a 60-minute continuous lecture, each lecture is divided into three or four main topics.

The types of courses vary from Biology and Life Sciences to Business Management and Humanities to Computer Science. There's a healthy variation in the number of disciplines on offer.

Finally there's a heavy social connect in the form of Google+ Hangout sessions with the faculty and students from around the world and discussion forums among other features. There are assignments and at the end of every course, there's an assessment. On successful completion of the course, you're rewarded with a certificate from Coursera.

edX

- Website: *http://www.edxonline.org/*
- Universities Associated: 2
- No. of Courses Offered: 1 at present, but more in the future
- Certifications (if any): Yes (Paid)
- Discussion Forums: Yes
- Video Lectures: Yes

We Say

edX is an initiative by MIT and Harvard universities to bring Ivy League type serious education to the masses. Some of its features include self-paced learning, online discussion groups, Wiki-based collaborative learning, assessment of learning as a student progresses through a course, and online laboratories. Just like Coursera, there will be grading, either by a computer software or by peer review.

So far, the website has only one course on offer – Circuits and Electronics. But more courses will be added in the near future. In fact, the MIT plans to use open source software to deliver the lectures, which can be adopted by other universities to deliver the lectures as well. So expect more universities to jump on this bandwagon.

NPTEL India

▶ Website: *http://nptel.iitm.ac.in/*
▶ Universities Associated: 8
▶ No. of Courses Offered: Over 200
▶ Certifications (if any): No
▶ Discussion Forums: No
▶ Video Lectures: Yes

We Say

National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL) is the only Government of India initiative we came across. This is a collaboration between seven IITs and IISc Bangalore offering courses from Aerospace Engineering to Nanotechnology and Humanities, among others. There are around 125 courses available in video form and around 135 courses in the web/text form. Video lectures are available for download as well. The course content is approved by the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE).

As compared to Coursera and edX, the interactivity element is lacking. Navigating the website is straightforward but many courses just list the syllabus with no indication as to when the course will start or where to go for further information.

Yale Open University

▶ Website: *http://oyc.yale.edu/*
▶ Universities Associated: 1
▶ No. of Courses Offered: 42
▶ Certifications (if any): No

▶ Discussion Forums: No
▶ Video Lectures: Yes

We Say

Yale Open University offers a variety of courses from Yale's previous years' recorded lectures. The disciplines include Art History, Poetry, Literature, and Philosophy among others. All courses have recorded video lectures, which can either be streamed or downloaded. The website interface is quite easy to navigate through.

Yale Open University doesn't offer any social connectivity in the form of discussion forums or interaction with the professors. It's pretty much a one-way thing, where you just listen and watch recorded videos. There are no assessments or quizzes or certifications associated with any course. But the thing that really stands out is the sheer variety of courses on offer. Imagine a course only on Milton's Paradise Lost or one on the Philosophy of Death!

Academic Earth

▶ Website: *http://www.academicearth.org*
▶ Universities Associated: 39
▶ No. of Courses Offered: 100+
▶ Certifications (if any): Yes (Paid)
▶ Discussion Forums: No
▶ Video Lectures: Yes

We Say

Academic Earth is a collection of all the courses from most of the open universities we have seen above. It has a wide collection of both video lectures as well as web-related courses. The website is well-designed. We really liked the feature called Playlist which as the name suggests

has a curated list of video lectures pertaining to a particular topic. Apart from well known universities, Academic Earth has a collaboration with a lot of education partners such as GMATHacks, Testing Is Easy, Khan Academy among others., which provide courses targetted towards

gearing you up for competitive tests such as GMAT or SAT. The disciplines in which courses are offered include Art & Design to History to Mathematics to Technology. You can select a course based on the University or the subject or in some cases even lecturers. Just like Udacity, Academic Earth also has tie-ups with institutions which allow you to earn a certificate in most of the disciplines taught on its site.

iTunes U

- ▶ Website: Universities Associated: 10+
- ▶ No. of courses offered: NA
- ▶ Certifications (if any): No
- ▶ Discussion Forums: No

We Say

iTunes U is Apple's answer to free education and it had just started off as a collection of audio and video podcasts. iTunes U still offers free courses, which you have to download on your iOS device. The courses are arranged in the bookshelf and the entire course is bundled in binders which gives it a very college book feel. Due to the binder UI, you can have all your notes, videos, audio clips etc., in one place.

Khan Academy

- ▶ Website: *http://www.khanacademy.org/*
- ▶ Universities Associated: None, it's a private educational organisation
- ▶ No. of courses offered: 100+
- ▶ Certifications (if any): No
- ▶ Discussion Forums: Yes

We Say

Khan Academy is the benchmark as far as online educational methods go. Formed by Salman Khan, an MIT engineer, Khan Academy has a very unique attempt at educa-

tion. Majority of the videos on this site cater to school-going students. But there are interesting courses in History which are graduate level. The teaching method is very traditional and old-school where Sal Khan (as he is popularly known) explains various concepts and theorems on a blackboard with multi-colored digital pens, which is very different from a long shot of the professor tutoring you as will be seen in the resources stated below. Another wonderful aspect of Khan Academy is the gamification philosophy integrated in the site. Every video you view gives you some points and as your points increase you keep unlocking new badges which is kind of cool. For students taking Math lessons, there is a Practice module, where you can take quizzes, answer questions based on topics, etc. You get a sort of report card which shows your progress and grasp of a particular topic. It is a wonderful tool for school students to improve their math proficiency. ◨

LEARN SKILLS FOR FREE - FREE TUTORIALS

The internet is an amazing place and a powerful resource to find lots of things for free, including tutorials and guides to help you easily learn and build new skills. You just have to know where to look and patiently search through the volumes of data and knowledge sharing out there.

In this chapter we will make a list of sites you can search through for specific tutorials and guides to gain access to training in those specific fields.

eHow

eHow for a very long time has been a one stop shop for learning on how to do everything ranging from complex application development to training your cat. eHow is a very comprehensive tutorials website with detailed instructions on how to do just about anything.

Go to: *ehow.com*

How Stuff Works

Howstuffworks.com is again one the most popular and frequently used website out there. It has built itself into a vast and diverse collection of topics ranging from food, health, computers, phones, dating and much more. One of the best things about this site is that it explains even the toughest things is a very simple and easy methodology making the tutorial simple to understand.

YouTube

Many might not be aware of this fact but *YouTube.com* is a huge collection of tutorials if you know how to look. You can use tools to download video tutorials off YouTube and learn something new depending on your interests. For example you can just go to YouTube and search something like "how to make money online" and you will get to watch so many tutorials that will show you practically what to do to make money online.

About.com

About.com video tutorial site has a collection of very informative how-to videos and screen casts on topics which include Parenting, Style, Electronics and Gadgets, etc. The collection is very comprehensive and more organised than what you would find on You Tube's collection of similar videos.

wikiHow

WikiHow.com is an editable how to site with more than 40,000 articles

developed by volunteers from different parts of the world. You're sure to find some nice tutorials here too if you go searching.

VideoJug

When it comes to how-to video tutorial sites, *videojug.com* is probably the largest and most comprehensive. It has videos on varied subjects like choosing a new hairstyle, playing golf, soccer, baseball, installing windows, how to kiss someone passionately or how to woo a woman.

Instructables

Instructables.com is a cool DIY site that has an extensive collection of user submitted how-to articles and easy instructions complete with videos and photographs. It's a community driven website where you can submit content, vote and comment on existing content.

W3Schools

W3Schools.com is a first class web development tutorials website which provides easy reference guides on languages like HTML, XHTML, CSS, PHP and JavaScript. All the tutorials are free and nicely explained through various examples.

2Createawebsite

2Createawebsite.com is a free tutorial site for beginners who want to learn how to create a website. if you want to learn how to play with HTML codes, this site is for you. visit it, it will provide a step by step guide through your website creation.

5min

5min.com is a video tutorial site with a difference- the videos are short and no more than 5 mins. Like other video sites, this too covers a wide range of topics, however it's yet to take on sites like VideoJug in the online video tutorial space.

VisualBasic Tutorial

Vbtutor.net is a visual basic learning center where you can learn pro-

gramming. anyone who is interested in learning Visual BasicProgramming, this site provides free tutorials on VB6, VB2008, VB2010 and Exel VBA

NETTUTS and PSDTUTS

NETTUTS.com and *PSDTUTS.com* are sister sites, in fact blogs, and definitely one of the best online resources on web development and Photoshop

skills. NETTUTS explores web development and designing in detail while PSDTUTS provides some world-class Adobe Photoshop tutorials.

SuTree

Sutree.com aggregates the best video tutorials from other video sites and covers a variety of topics like softwares, games, pets & animals etc. Like instructables, SuTree is also a community driven website and lets you find videos through tags and subscribe to the RSS feed of the site.

MAKE Magazine

Brings the do-it-yourself (DIY) mindset to all of the technology in your life. MAKE is loaded with cool DIY projects that help you make the most of the

technology you already own.Go to: *makezine.com*

Hack a Day

Hackaday.com serves up fresh hacks (short tutorials and device hacks) every day from around the web and one in-depth 'How-To hack' guide each week.

100 Skills Every Man Should Know

Another compilation article with instructions to help you learn new skills. This one says it's geared for men, but I think most of these skills are applicable to women as well. Go to: *http://goo.gl/lsPa*

StumbleUpon

A collective set of recommendations from thousands of hours of searching by web users who share your interests. It's basically a recommendation engine. Users add to this engine by providing their personal recommendations on what sites are worth your time. Go to: *stumbleupon.com*

Zen Habits

The ultimate productivity and self-improvement blog. Zen Habits is about finding simplicity in the daily chaos of our lives. It's about clearing the clutter so we can focus on what's important, create something amazing, and find happiness. Lot's of learning material here. Go to: *zenhabits.net*

Spreeder

This site is focused on teaching you one new skill: speed reading. And it does a great job of doing so. Go to: *spreeder.com*

DIY Network

A go-to destination for rip-up, knock-out home improvement projects. The site offers expert answers the most sought-after questions regarding creative projects for DIY enthusiasts. Go to: *diynetwork.com*

Scitable

It's a free science library and personal learning tool that currently concentrates on genetics, the study of evolution, variation, and the rich complexity of living organisms. Go to: *nature.com/scitable*

All Recipes

A complete guide to recipes and cooking tips. If you'd like to learn to be a better cook, this site is for you. Go to: *allrecipes.com*

43 Folders

This site is more about inspiring you to follow-through with your goals than it is about learning new skills. But I think following-through with your goals is a skill. Most people never quite get there. Go to: *43folders.com*
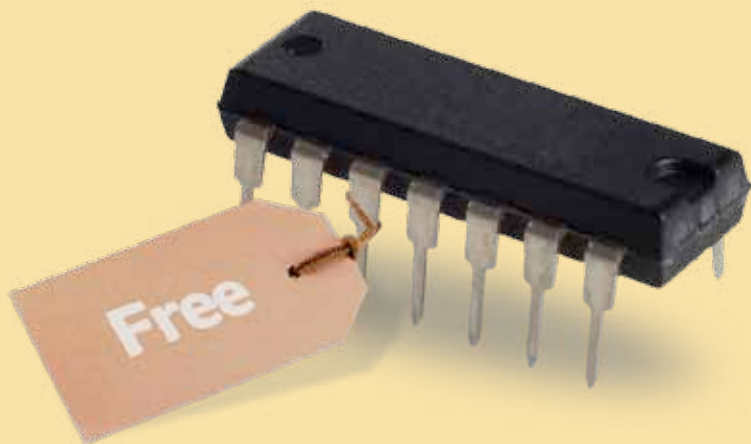
FREE (AND OPEN) HARDWARE

You must have heard a lot about Open Source technologies by now, so we won't elaborate much on that. Open source hardware has been a burning topic in the technology world for some time now. According to the dictionary, open source hardware is defined as 'a hardware device that can be copied, made and sold by anyone without any royalties or payment.' The device can be copied because the design details are published by the developer so that others can add, delete or modify and then share the changes that they've made with the open source community. In other words, the rules of the game are similar to those of open source software.

Let's move on to some of the open source hardware technologies that have been trending in the market.

Arduino

The latest innovation within the open source fraternityis the Arduino, an open source prototyping platform used to design flexible embedded electronic systems, capable of various applications ranging from simple sensors to complex applications (such as running a web server). The community offers the hardware, with the intention of using the skills of millions of programmers, who come up with a final product that's superior and bug free. Another reason is to offer customisation. Open source stuff can be customised as per the user's content but you need a bit of programming skills to achieve that. Arduino programming involves C/C++ and the development environment utilities are compliant to GNU Public Licence and Copyleft. If you know C/C++, working on Arduino is simple as it has been reduced from mastering micro-controllers and implementing design to just coding in the Arduino development environment. No need to rack your brains understanding the design of the system, just rush to application development. While the system will be cheapest if assembled by hand, pre-assembled kits are also available for around ₹1,500.

Raspberry Pi

The Raspberry Pi is a credit card sized computer that you can plug into your TV or monitor. Add a keyboard and a mouse and it's ready to run. It runs Linux (either Ubuntu or ArchLinux). Unfortunately it doesn't run Windows as Windows doesn't support ARM 11. If you've been lucky enough to see a Raspberry Pi, you may have noticed a crucial thing missing on the miniature device – the secondary storage. That's because it uses a SD card as a

hard disk where the operating system is installed. This approach makes it simple to switch between operating systems.

By now you must be wondering "What can I do with this device?" The answer is: a lot. It can run a desktop environment, your favourite web browser and even play Blu-ray quality video. Pretty hard to believe with just 256 MB of RAM, right?

Other applications of this technology are in home automation or as in-car PCs or a full-fledged computer for your home -entertainment system. Currently, work is on to integrate bluetooth or Wi-Fi technology into the hardware.

Openmoko

This is a project to create a family of open source mobile phones including hardware, specs as well as the operating system. Running on the philosophy of 'Free the Phone', the project was started in the year 2006 and today, it has its own operating system for phones called Om or Openmoko Linux. It supports a user-friendly GUI built on the X.Org Server. Although Openmoko has missed its release dates many times in the past, it continues to offer an open hardware architecture for others to develop on. Distributors are currently selling updated versions of Openmoko Inc's phone, Neo FreeRunner, released in 2008, to advanced users. The software stack for FreeRunner and future-free phones is being developed by the community. As of 2012, the modern 3.5G / OMAP3 upgrade to FreeRunner and an upgraded OpenPhoenux (also known as GTA04 Complete) is available.

WeTab

WeTab is a tablet computer based on an open hardware and software concept. As the name suggests, WeTab uses an open source design which is pretty cool. Firstly, it allows you to customise the tab the way you want and secondly, by adopting open source hardware and software, the world's working towards the improvement of your product. Any upgrades can be directly passed on to the final device after testing. The operating system of the tablet is based on MeeGo technology. MeeGo is jointly developed by Intel, Nokia and a large open source developer community and is hosted –

as a true open source operating system – by the Linux Foundation. The widget-based user interface enables quick access to a comprehensive world of applications, news and multimedia content. True multi-tasking in combination with the use of common technologies such as HTML5, Adobe Flash and Adobe AIR provides users with some unique capabilities.

RepRap Project

The RepRap Project has led to the development of a generation of 3D printers that can replicate themselves. It's capable of making most of its parts using ABS, Polylactic Acid and similar thermopolymers. Till date, the work on this project has led to the development of four 3D printers namely Darwin, Mendel, Prusa Mendel and Huxley, released in 2010.

As an open hardware, all the designs produced are released under the GNU Public license. The printers use CAD/CAM to design and implement their replicas. Due to its open source nature, the project's developers hope to distribute the printer to communities so that they can print expensive complex industrial products without the need of expensive industrial materials.

Vivaldi Tablets

It's a 7-inch tablet with an ARM-based processor and an open source operating system, the Mer Linux and KDE Plasma Active. The Vivaldi received an overwhelming response when the pre-booking of the device began, in late May this year. The launch of the device is eagerly awaited by tech enthusiasts.

The manufacturers upgraded the RAM from 512 MB to 1 GB plus the device now has an add-on store, Vivaldi's version of an App store. Seeing the amazing response to the Vivaldi, the company hopes that app developers

bring out more free and paid apps for this device. The rationale being that devices with apps boost sales.

The major difference between big shots like Google and Apple in this field, as pointed out by the manufacturers, is that anyone can build their own applications using the Make.Play.Live as the user interface. So for instance, a college can have a selected content list from which its students can download apps, books etc. This may turn out to be a pretty successful product.

Free Hardware of the no-money kind

Now comes the part where we tell you how to get the actual free hardware. What we'll talk about here is getting stuff for real cheap, if not entirely free. If you really don't want to spend a penny, the best way would be to get a friend to gift you the things you want! For that, you have a site called *http://www.wishlistr.com/.* It lets you create wishlists and share it with friends and family so they know exactly what to get you. Talk about subtle hints!

Two sites that deserve a special mention (thought we don't vouch for these) are *http://www.fs4i.com* and *http://freekaamaal.com* Don't be fooled by the names of these sites. There are no freebies here but they offer great deals and discount coupons. With a ₹100 discount coupon one of our readers got an 8 GB pendrive for ₹200! So keep an eye out for such deals at these sites to, maybe gift your sister on Rakhi or a geek friend (like us) on his/her birthday.

Some other sites to visit before buying your hardware are

▶ *http://www.smcinternational.in/,*
▶ *http://primeabgb.com/,*
▶ *http://deltapage.com/,http://www.theitdepot.com/,*
▶ *http://techshop.in/ ,http://deltapage.com/*

Many of these do have great deals. And then, we have your friend Google, which is the best place to look for deals. However, be careful of the following before purchasing your hardware:

▶ Have a look at all possible places to find the best deal.
▶ Read the specifications of the product that you're about to buy properly.
▶ No one actually does this, but, READ the terms and conditions of delivery and the company policy in case the product is damaged.
▶ Opt for payment on delivery if given the option.
▶ Once delivered, check the product in front of the delivery person so that the matter can be taken care of then and there. 🔴

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